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THE GLORY HOLE

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HISTORICAL

THE 'FORTY-NINERS †
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THE MAGIC FOREST
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THE GLORY HOLE

BY
STEWART EDWARD WHITE



GARDEN CITY NEW YORK
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DEFINITION

Glory Hole: A small window through which one may look into the interior of a furnace.

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THE GLORY HOLE

THE GLORY HOLE

CHAPTER I

I

EVERY one of the sixty-odd thousands who made up the population of Little Falls believed that Little Falls was the most beautiful city in America. Nor was this entirely the judgment of inexperience. One met Little Falls people all over the world: probably no city of its size could produce as many assiduous travellers. They would tell you that themselves very soon after they had met you. In three seasons of the year there was something to be said for their opinion of the place. It occupied a bend in the river and the low hills on either side. Its streets were wide; and bordering them all, down to the very edge of the business district, stood double rows of broad-leaf maples. All the residential section was set in lawns. Even the workmen's small cottages had their little plots of green; and some fortunate tradition had almost eliminated fences between them. It was pleasant of a warm day to walk or drive beneath the deep continuous mottled shade, with the close-clipped green grass on either side, and the mingled sound of cicadas and whirling sprinklers. Most of the houses, especially of the well-to-do, were set back from the street. You saw wide verandas and glimpsed dark cool interiors through open doors. Then as you gained the heights and could look down, you saw beneath you apparently an almost unbroken forest. Here and there a roof or a chimney showed, or the spire of a church thrust forth; but save for these and the tall electric light towers, you could never have imagined a city below you. Over opposite, some miles distant, rose the rounded western hills, and up and down the wide wooded valley the river gleamed here and there in silvery glimpses. Even down by the river front, where the one long business street threw out its

short laterals, and the stern-wheel steamers spluttered and belched forth their dangerous wood sparks, the perspective so diminished the treeless area that it was insignificant in comparison with the deep, still, green forest nearer at hand.

But you had rarely to notice these things for yourself. They were sure to be pointed out to you by each of your successive hosts. Nobody ever visited Little Falls without having had at least three hosts, or without indigestion. It was the most hospitable of little cities.

"But," this particular host would conclude, "you should see it in the fall when the leaves turn!"

Three seasons of the year filled Little Falls with enough satisfaction to carry over illusion to the fourth. Spring, summer, and autumn had a glamour that successfully hazed the revelations of winter. For with the dropping of the leaves the forest vanished, and the fact became apparent that Little Falls was for the most part built merely of little wooden houses, most of which dated from the jig-saw age. Up on the hill were a few fine old square mansions in spacious grounds; on Prospect Street stood three or four "modern" dwellings built of rubbed plaster, or of striped black beams, or in accordance with some other daring conception; but the great and solid majority had either lightning rods, or roof-pole vertebræ like fish, or mill-turned porch rails, or scroll-work gable ends, or all of them. The winter visitor saw only a commonplace little city. The bare maple trees hardly registered at all. Their pale beauty of grays and lilacs, of black tracery against a leaden sky, of frost-burned twigs or stark up-reaching nakedness was not of the sort to force the attention: it was visible only to the seeing and the searching eye. Occasionally, at this time of year, the shivering guest found it difficult to agree with his host's Prospect Hill rhapsodies. But the host could never have suspected that; and after all Little Falls hospitality was as strong in winter as in summer. The visitor felt for his soda mint tablets and descended the hill.

II

There were a dozen leading families. These, together with their branches and relatives, and a few rather unexplained outside friends, constituted Little Falls. If any one of them had a guest, it was considered the bounden duty—and pleasure—of all the rest to entertain that guest. He was assured of two solid

weeks of formal dinners, provided he lasted that long. The word "formal" is used advisedly. That was the period not only of many courses, but of food metamorphoses. Those things that are normally green were served pink, and those things that are normally pink were served green. If a hostess could succeed by some novel means in so completely disguising the ordinary humble potato or chop that one could not possibly guess what he might be eating, she was thoroughly happy. And the first cottage cheese coloured with what seemed to be Paris green and served in balls with the salad turned eleven leading society women the same colour. Thus, in a manner, the fortunate—and accredited—visitor to Little Falls was entertained not only because of a genuine and fundamental hospitality, but also because he was a good excuse. Guests were not everyday matters. There were interims between visits, during which in secret were gathered or invented, and hidden away, many spectacular gastronomic perversions. There were times when a visitor came as a positive safety valve for these stored energies.

III

One of these families, the Kirbys, could perhaps be considered the leader of society; although in the strict sense, definite leadership there was none. Why the Kirbys were of the Twelve at all it would be difficult to say; as, indeed, it would be difficult to say why the Peckhams or the Savages, or others were not. The latter possessed equal cultivation, greater wealth, and the same number of eyes, ears, and noses. Possibly it was because Fred Kirby's father and grandfather had always lived in Little Falls. The twelve families were not really snobbish; they did not keep people out: they merely did not take them in. There was more inertia and self-satisfaction than exclusiveness in their attitude.

So when Fred Kirby brought his bride to live in a small rented frame house, not on the Hill, she was taken in promptly and entertained all around as simply and naturally as though she had been brought up among them. Minnie Kirby was of the vivid, alert, restless-minded, vital type that responds abundantly to kind treatment. She liked them all instantly, and so genuinely that they liked her. This first burst of feeling, as was natural, wore a little thinner after a time; but it remained for a period of youth as a basis of life, and it explains how, through her other qualities, little by little she managed to take the leadership with-

out struggle, without friction, or indeed without real appreciation of the fact that it was a question of leadership at all. The others followed her, asked each other what was Minnie's latest innovation, and relinquished to her the first crack at the distinguished guest, merely because she possessed a little more energy, a little more initiative and daring in searching out and adopting new things, a little more contempt for public opinion outside her own circle, and a little more restless social conscience. She had been the first—we have for the moment gone ahead of the house-below-the-Hill period—to put some kind of livery on the man who drove her horses—he would have resented being called the coachman—and in consequence was covertly sneered at in the local paper and openly jeered by the small boys. She had been the first to serve dinner at night instead of at noon, for example; the first to discover that such a fruit as grapefruit existed, and that artichokes were edible; she was the first to present to a friend for Christmas one of those jagged-toothed shears intended to dismember roast fowl, to the great mystification of said friend, who wanted to clip hedges with it and considered it ill-adapted to the purpose. Minnie always had "the latest."

This was many years ago, for Minnie was now more than thirty. She had in the first years of her married life been forced to yield precedence on one thing only. Old Lady Watkins, the "Dowager," had been the bold spirit who instituted the idea of an "inside" man. Heretofore all the inside work had been done by "girls"—a conventional term of low descriptive power—the "second girl," sometimes assisted by the "upstairs girl." After Old Lady Watkins, the Pines and the Atkinses also had inside men; but Mr. Pine was the president of the First National Bank, and Mr. Atkins owned the Iron Works. It was an undoubted distinction, but Minnie had to forego it. The Kirbys could not afford it. She, along with many others, was forced to subsidize the temporary services of a coloured person with a rather bulgy dress suit whom they called by his first name. It was the fiction, scrupulously respected, that Charles should be considered as the old family retainer of the people he that evening happened to serve; and everybody present loyally forgot they had ever seen him anywhere else, just as they loyally pretended the onion-pattern "extra china" from Zimberg's had not been on their own tables the week before. It was Mrs. Kirby's restless interest in such things that brought her to the head of the game. She it was who

first dined the distinguished guest, after the house that harboured him had had its innings.

Fortunately for Little Falls these qualities that had so imperceptibly advanced her were embodied in a charming and gracious exterior. Mrs. Kirby was of the tall, slender, trailly, and wilty order that wears its clothes gracefully. She had naturally an air of distinction, enhanced by deceitfully dark circles under her deceitfully languorous eyes: deceitful, because she was perfectly healthy and of remarkable energy. The intermingling of apparent languor and vivacity was distinctively charming. Strangers always asked the identity of "that well-bred-looking woman." Her features were not too good-looking.

Sometimes the same strangers expressed a wonder as to what she had seen in Fred Kirby. To the casual eye he was merely a burly, round-faced, hearty, good-humoured creature who thought his wife perfect and whose chief desire was to fulfil her every wish. But the men who knew him best shook their heads. They were beginning to fear him in business and recognized that the burly exterior well symbolized a tremendously dynamic, not to say domineering, spirit. He was of the type that over-rides; always good-natured, but always blind to anything in opposition except resistance to be overcome. As to his sheer ability otherwise, no one yet could tell. There could be no doubt that he thought Minnie about the most wonderful thing that had ever happened to Little Falls. Never for a moment did it occur to him to doubt her judgment or her taste or the absolute appropriateness of every innovation. She had been through college, which in those days was very unusual for a woman, while he had not. From Smith she had brought an interest in Women's Clubs, Musical Activities, Library Extension work, and similar things, which Fred considered remarkably intellectual. His attitude toward them was outwardly humorous and inwardly respectful. He saw in himself a complete and humble antithesis to this vivid, flashing, clever, intellectual, aristocratic-looking creature. Often he would sit in the leather-cushioned Morris chair before the little grate and stare at his thick capable hands with comical perplexity.

"I certainly am a coarse, clumsy mutt," said he. "How a girl like you ever came to marry *me*——"

"Well, I did," she interrupted, flitting across the room to rumple his hair, implant a butterfly kiss on his forehead, and

flutter back again, "for better or for worse; so you might just as well quit wondering and listen to what I was saying."

But for all his admiring subjection Fred hardened to an unexpected and consistent firmness on one point.

Minnie was inclined to be extravagant. She did not spend money foolishly or aimlessly. Her clear brain saw definitely the object she wished to attain and the means necessary to attain it. The trouble was that so many of her objects, like the inside man, were as yet beyond reach. If she undertook a thing that thing became an individual creation, complete, unchangeable. Compromises were utterly foreign to her nature. Once Minnie had visioned her conception, she found it almost impossible to change it. Modification upset all her sense of balance. It must be the original idea, intact, or else a brand-new one. Sometimes the original idea was expensive, too expensive. But to Minnie, who had considered it in all its details, it had become almost like a living thing. The fine fervour of creativeness threw a fog across all future considerations.

Here Fred unexpectedly showed a firmness and a clear commonsense that would have surprised those who thought him blinded by infatuation. He refused flatly to live beyond his present means; he declined to discount the future, no matter how certain that future seemed to be. At times he was maddening in his inability to see the point; but, though distressed, he stuck to his guns. He was willing to redouble his efforts, but he would not plunge either socially or commercially.

IV

As a consequence it was nearly two years before the Kirbys moved from the small rented house at the foot of the Hill. During that time one girl of all work was all they ran to; and there was only the horse car, with its jingling bell, to take Minnie downtown to market. It speaks much for the fundamental domestic stability of these two that the resultant clash of ideals did not cause wreck. Fred was distressed and unhappy; Minnie was chafed and impatient over his maddening conservative obstinacy; but in time an adjustment was reached. Minnie's clear sense saw the point, though her leaping spirit was always envisioning what might be done with a little more money. Fred worked harder and achieved wonders under the stimulation of his distress that he could not immediately give Minnie all she should have.

So it was not long before they moved up on the Hill, where Fred had bought a lot some time before. Here they built a comfortable, roomy wooden house of the type occupied by the rest of their friends. Across the back yard was a well-appointed small stable housing the "team," a surrey, a closed carriage, and a wonderful sleigh with grille-work dash and bi-coloured dyed horse-tail plumes. It possessed a small "office," in which were hung the harnesses, and containing a round hot stove, a padded swivel chair, and delicious aromas of warm oiled leather, rank tobacco, and harness soap. Aloft were the haymow and living apartments for Ezra. Ezra managed to keep the wide lawns mowed and watered, the autumn leaves raked up, the horses and their equipment glossy and shiny, and various surreptitious small boys fascinated by his small hot den, with its delicious odours, his rank pipe, his monosyllabic conversation, and his spotty dog. Ezra possessed of his own right a coach dog, who was a grave, single-minded person with a passion for horses. He slept in the stall under the manger, out of reach of hoofs; and at all other times was so occupied with what he conceived to be his reason for existence that he had scant attention to pay to humans. Nevertheless, his many spots, his calm, grave, almost mystic, pre-occupation and his aloofness rendered him attractive.

Three rings of an electric bell would apprise Ezra that Mrs. Kirby wanted the "coop," whereupon they sallied forth. Beneath the which, his nose all but touching the horses' heels, stood the spotty dog, calmly and restrainedly prepared to fulfil the great functions of his being; which were, (a) to stay beneath that axle no matter what the gait or road, and (b) to keep his nose just touching the horses' flying heels. Those who sneered at the livery and the inside man looked on the spotty dog as a further affectation; but as a matter of fact he was Ezra's and had in the beginning been the subject of a serious battle.

CHAPTER II

I

MINNIE KIRBY descended the steps as the coupé came to a standstill.

"Downtown," she told Ezra briefly, and took her seat.

Minnie raised a tiny parasol, like a round fan, to protect her face against a sun already blocked out by the heavy shade trees. But it was part of the picture, and she looked very erect and dainty and aloof and attractive as her equipage rolled along.

After a block and a half she suddenly ordered Ezra to stop. He pulled up without further instruction opposite a very unpretentious little house, one of a row of others not much differing from it. In the dooryard a plump childlike young woman with dancing black eyes and unruly hair was shaking out a rug. As the Kirby equipage drove up to the cobblestoned gutter, she dropped the rug and came flying through the gate.

"You dear!" she cried, "I've been *longing* to see you!"

"I can't come in, Kitty," smiled Minnie, "I just stopped to tell you the news. My brother is coming to visit us."

"Not Freeman!" cried Kitty, falling back against a maple tree for support.

"The same. He's just finished at Harvard."

"My *dear!* I shall be stricken with terror!"

"You don't need to worry, Kittikens; you're an old married woman. But the girls better starch their flounces."

"Won't Mattie Walker be *thrilled!* Tell me about him," begged Mrs. Cadwell. "All I've had is vague rumours of splendour."

"Well, he's very good-looking," began Minnie judicially.

"Dark, of course, like you."

"Dark and romantic. He has eyelashes that are positively indecent on a man, and eyes that go with them. Tall, slender, lazy, and wears his clothes well. I never knew anybody so easily bored."

"He sounds thrilling!" cried Kitty.

Minnie laughed again. "But his manners are so good that no one but a sister could ever guess when he's bored. He has the most exquisite taste in everything: and I am particularly glad he's coming just now, for he can help me with the dining room."

"What about the dining room? You haven't told me anything about the dining room," complained Kitty.

"I've decided to do it over: that dark walnut is so gloomy. The Lord of the Exchequer says we won't have to pawn the family jewels to do it, so we are going ahead."

"That will be wonderful!" cried Kitty heartily.

Minnie leaned back. "I must run along," said she. "I've got to go to market and buy the blessed Fred his dinner." She leaned forward again, her eyes thoughtful. "Speaking of Fred——"

"Yes, speaking of Fred!" echoed the other and suddenly burst into laughter.

Minnie surveyed her with affectionate annoyance.

"Now what is it, you flibbertigibbet?" she demanded.

"Nothing; it's silly; I'm ashamed. I just saw a picture of Fred's face the first time anybody gave him a bored Harvard look down the bridge of his nose."

She went off into another gale of laughter.

"They've never met, except at our wedding," admitted Minnie, "I don't know how they'll hit it off."

II

Minnie drove down the Hill to the river flat. For some distance the shade trees persisted, and the lawns, but the houses were older and of a simpler construction than those on the Hill. Here and there one saw a stately old mansion of the square three-storied type and a cupola atop, without distinction of architecture, but possessing a solid dignity of its own. Most of these buildings showed signs of wear and, if not actual neglect, at least indifference to appearance. Displayed in the windows of many of the smaller houses were signs of Rooms to Let; Boarders Wanted; Dressmaking; Family Washing. On the pillars of a fine old Colonial mansion a brass plate advertised a tailor shop; while another called attention to an undertaking establishment. Indeed everywhere one saw indications that this once select residential district of the 'seventies was now nothing more than a field abandoned by Society, into which slowly were creep-

ing the advance guards of the Business that would eventually occupy it.

One old square mansion stood as a rock against the rising tide; the grass still mown, the iron picket fences still shiny black with paint, the gilt-tipped iron gates bright and apparently ready to swing back to permit the exit of correctly turned-out equipages, while around it the teeming, herding, restless tide of life squalled and fought and hung out its washing.

Upon this relic Minnie looked always with a curious eye; for it had a connection with the Kirbys. It had been built by Fred's great-grandfather and now belonged to Fred's great-uncle; who was the only surviving member of the family. Of course there was Cousin Jim, she always acknowledged to herself parenthetically, but one got out of the habit of counting him. He was only a third or fourth cousin—some collateral branch—anyway. Uncle Ezekiel, however, had not lived in his house within the memory of any but the oldest inhabitants. At some absurd age he had run away from home and a parent who believed that church twice on Sunday *plus* Sunday School was the minimum duty of a Pious Child: making so complete a job of it that little Ezekiel, who seems to have been a child both of spirit and of sagacity, waited until he was big enough to run away with some hope of success, and then did so, so thoroughly that nobody heard from him again for years. He must, however, have kept in touch with events, for as soon as circumstances made of him the sole heir to the Kirby property, word came from him in some mysterious fashion. The Trust Company carried out its instructions. The old Kirby place was cared for from the small funds in the estate; but Uncle Ezekiel's adventures, his present circumstances, his whereabouts, even his personal appearance were absolutely unknown to any one in Little Falls. The Trust Company had merely the address of another Trust Company farther East. Everybody agreed it was all very romantic; and of a warm summer evening young people liked to saunter down, judiciously paired, to gaze through the bars of the high iron fence at the moonlight through the forest of oak trees above the wide expanse of lawn, and the old square mansion silvery in the distance, and the one tiny light in Tom's, the caretaker's, room.

Minnie often drove by on her way downtown just to look and speculate. Her marketing was a leisurely progress. At one place and another she stopped outside a store. She did not

descend, but leaned forward and stared fixedly until she caught the eye of one of the clerks. The latter would come out bareheaded and in his shirt sleeves, pencil and tablet in hand. Then on the curb would ensue discussions as to what was in market, and the quality and freshness of it, and the price. Often the clerk would bring articles out for Mrs. Kirby's inspection. The packages were waited for, and were piled at Ezra's feet. Occasionally other carriages would pull up alongside, and Minnie and the occupants thereof would greet each other and gossip back and forth, while the traffic wheeled and eddied around the obstruction they made, and the one policeman in sight looked at them benignly. Or other people going by on foot would stop to talk. Madison Street at this time of the afternoon was like a reception where one met all one's friends. And the glistening team, their noses held at a haughty fashionable tilt by overhead check reins, stamped their feet and tossed their heads; the spotty coach dog lurked beneath the axle; and Ezra sat patiently, consoled by a surreptitious quid of tobacco which practice had enabled him to enjoy with invisible jaw motion. The same practice had also bestowed on Ezra the handy ability to watch his mistress apparently with the back of his head. And in those brief moments when her attention was not eyes-front or thereabouts, Ezra could spit quicker, farther, and with less facial expression than any other man on this or any other habitable sphere.

Conversation this particular afternoon centred on Freeman Farnum and his approaching visit. During her two years in Little Falls, Minnie had somehow managed to build up a legend of Freeman. Never had she more than mentioned him casually, but she possessed that peculiar loyalty to or pride in anything pertaining to herself that automatically puts a value on it in other people's eyes. It was gathered, on the whole, that Freeman was a pretty superior sort of chap, of great worldly knowledge, impeccable taste, and enjoying the friendship and consideration of the great. Now that the long-continued ruffle of drums was apparently at last to come to climax in the actual appearance of Our Hero, the town was interested.

"And we need something to stir us up," added plump and vivacious little Mrs. Dunning. "You must let me give a dinner for him."

"That will be charming; he'll be delighted. It is too good of you."

"Nonsense, Minnie," said Mrs. Dunning bluntly, "I'm glad of the chance to get out the silver, and I'm sick of getting it out for the same old crowd that knows every dent in it. Your brother is a godsend."

Somewhat the same idea was expressed by another individual, a man this time, who advanced out of the narrow belt of shade to greet her. He was a tall man, of perhaps forty, whose slender form was lost in the ill fit of his old brown suit of clothes. His face, too, was thin, and cast in quizzical lines. A straggling brown moustache almost concealed a sensitive mouth. Little wrinkles of speculative humour made crow's-feet about his eyes: which, if looked at squarely by one of the proper degree of vision, would have shown not only humour but a patient and sympathetic understanding. Little Falls saw merely Cousin Jim Kirby, a rather unpresentable old codger, who could rarely be induced to go out in society, who dwelt in a tiny untidy detached house full of books, and *who did nothing!* He had a little income from the old Kirby estate, and on this he elected to live. Nobody in Little Falls could understand this. The general attitude toward him was of contempt for his lack of ambition and a sneaking liking for his personality. To Little Falls it was inconceivable that any man should not want to "get ahead."

To Minnie he was a problem and an exasperation. It was bad enough to have a Kirby so "shiftless." It was worse when that Kirby refused, as did Cousin Jim, to realize the fact or to be impressed or subdued by the opposite qualities in his only relatives. Cousin Jim's sense of humour was misguided and misplaced, and his social appearances ill-timed and ill-dressed. He was calmly oblivious to veiled rebuke or open example. He would not take seriously the things he should take seriously; indeed he had an irritating and apparently genuine way of ignoring them altogether. For example, Minnie often came out from a shop to find him, one foot on the hub, conversing amiably with Ezra; a fine sight for Madison Street to behold! Nothing would persuade him of the indignity of such a performance. Furthermore, it was demoralizing for Ezra: at such times he almost spat openly. And to cap it all, Minnie had often an uncomfortable feeling that Cousin Jim was not taking even her seriously, though she had nothing definite on which to base that assumption.

"Hullo, Minnie," he now greeted her. "I hear we are at last

to get a glimpse of Freeman. That's fine. Now I suppose you'll all feed each other again."

"Naturally I expect he will be entertained," replied Minnie a little stiffly.

"Pity Little Falls isn't on the trunk line," went on Cousin Jim gravely. "We get our visitors too few and far between. Now it has occurred to me that if somebody would establish a kind of Guest Exchange somewhere it would be a good thing. There must be a lot of young fellows around the country—fine young fellows, good family, good clothes, good looks and all the rest of it—who would be tickled to be guests, if you only knew where to get them. Then when the family silver needed exercise, or someone had discovered a new way to cook tripe or something like that, why you could put in an application for a good Class A or Class B guest at any time and not have to wait for the regular flight."

Cousin Jim smiled a little at his conceit. Minnie did not smile. She thought the suggestion not at all amusing. Cousin Jim flickered an eye at her.

"If you take it as a *serious* joke, it *isn't* amusing," said he.

That was the worst of Cousin Jim: you could never tell when he might be secretly poking a little fun at you.

"Going duck shooting next week," he volunteered amiably, after a moment.

"That will be nice," replied Minnie as amiably; then as a thought flashed through her quick brain. "That is the first of the season, isn't it? How long will you be gone?"

"About a week, I think," said Cousin Jim. "I'll try to bring you some mallards."

"Yes, do," urged Minnie. Her volatile spirit seemed to be animated by a new idea, which she at once put into effect as soon as they had left the curb by ordering Ezra to stop at the telegraph office. Here for the first time she descended, and herself sent a wire to Freeman Farnum setting a date the first of the week for his arrival. She returned to the carriage with an air of satisfaction. The opening of the duck season was most fortunate. Of course Freeman must meet Cousin Jim eventually; and Minnie was very fond of Cousin Jim as a "dear old thing"; but—well, the opening of the duck season *was* fortunate!

Hardly had the stately little equipage returned to Madison Street when it was hailed from the sidewalk by a vision in the

fluffiest of pink dresses. The vision was almost wigglingly animated, its face wreathed in smiles, its gloved hands fluttering, its dark eyes sparkling. This was Camilla Stearns, another of Minnie's best friends, a damsel whose stream of unquenchable enthusiasms and super-generous admirations the checks and hindrances of a not too easy life but caused to foam the higher. On Minnie's invitation she opened the door of the coupé and stepped in, settling her pink fluffiness with some fluttering. By the time she had come to rest and had folded her hands in her lap she had commented ecstatically on the perfectly *wonderful* appearance of the horses, the harness, and the coupé, the perfectly *sweet* and dainty picture Minnie made in the said coupé; the perfectly *ravishing* and becoming effect of Minnie's toilette together with its singular appropriateness to Minnie's air of aristocratic distinction; the perfectly *exquisite* cut and material of the gown, so different from anything one could get from Miss Tweed; and the perfectly *darling* new pin that Minnie was wearing, and where did she get it? Then Camilla turned to her and began serious conversation.

"It's too exciting, the news that your brother is actually coming at last. Poor little me! I'm so flustered! We haven't had such an event in years! It's going to be quite too terrific keeping him busy and entertained. He *must* have a good opinion of us! You will give him a dinner of course; but after that? What do you think of a picnic out to Longman's Lake?"

"I don't really believe Freeman would care much for a picnic," said Minnie. "He is rather fastidious in his tastes."

"Of course. A little informal dance perhaps at the Country Club; and perhaps there'll be something at the theatre. A theatre party is such *fun*, don't you think so?"

"I have a plan: I'm not sure of it yet. But you must help me when the time comes. Remember!"

Camilla's eyes shone. Gladly would she help: anything she could do! Her heart warmed within her at the implication of intimate dependence. Poor Camilla: she had so much to outpour.

By this time the coupé had drawn up before the building in which was Fred's office. Minnie, vetoing Camilla's eager offer to inform Fred of their arrival, herself went up to the office. She opened the little wicket gate in the outer room, nodded brightly at the two bookkeepers there, and crossed the strip of aromatic coco matting to the inner door, where she paused.

The private office was full of tobacco smoke. Fred in his shirt sleeves, a chewed unlighted cigar in his mouth, one thick leg over the arm of his swivel chair, was talking to a visitor. Minnie, pausing in the doorway, caught the last words of an anecdote. At the same moment the visitor saw her and half rose.

"How do you do, Mr. Marshall," she greeted him. "I've always suspected these dreadful tales of overwork at the office, the terrible days of feverish toil. You poor driven creatures!"

Fred wheeled his swivel chair and grinned. He was secretly very proud of Minnie's appearance framed in the doorway, of the picture she made in her close-fitting trailing garments, with her small poised head and the air of playful rebuke.

"I've come to take you home, sir," she informed him.

The visitor went. Fred put on his coat.

"That's good," he said. "Anybody with you?"

Fred had no conscious reason for asking this question: and yet there were some who held Fred to be a coarse-fibred creature without instincts.

"Only Camilla Stearns."

Fred stopped as short as though he had encountered a concrete wall, and a look of vivid dismay overspread his countenance.

"Now don't be foolish," Minnie answered this display. "Camilla is a lovely girl."

"Of course she is," hastened Fred, "one of the finest. But you see I'm kind of tired to-day, and doggone it all, she *gushes* so. I feel like I'd been standing under a waterfall when she gets through with me."

"I have the coupé," she pointed out, "and you can sit in front with Ezra."

"Oh, all right," he agreed, a trifle suspicious of this concession. This suspicion had not entirely left him when they reached the sidewalk. He tipped his hat hastily to the eagerly smiling Camilla, darted around the vehicle, and took his place decisively beside the solemn but deeply appreciative Ezra before anybody had any chance to change anybody's mind. All the way home he could hear the sound of chattering inside and his heart was uplifted within him.

As they turned in at the driveway a sudden thought smote him, and a great gloom descended upon him. In the next ten seconds he had visualized a torrential before-dinner hour terminated only by the necessity of his, Fred's, escorting Camilla to her home

through the falling dusk. Perhaps Minnie might even ask her to stay for dinner: he would not put it beyond her. This vision he worked out in minute detail while the coupé mounted the driveway. There were some who also denied the practical Fred an imagination. He was as panic-stricken and helpless as a boy who hears footsteps approaching him and the jam closet; and yet this same man had that day grimly finished a hard-fought deal that was to bring him in considerable money.

However, his fears were groundless. Minnie opened the coupé door and descended, and even as Camilla stirred her furbelows to follow, she spoke.

"Ezra," she commanded, "drive Miss Stearns home, or wherever she wishes to go. I wouldn't think of your walking all that distance," she said sweetly.

III

"There!" triumphed Minnie as the coupé rolled away. "You see you're not going to be swallowed whole after all. Aren't I clever? You are so *ridiculous* about poor Camilla! And Fred, I was positively ashamed at the way you left me standing on the sidewalk to open my own door and get in as best I could."

"Good heavens!" groaned Fred, conscience-stricken.

Minnie laughed. "Never mind," she said at last. "Let's look over the place."

Like most building lots of those early days this was of considerable extent. It boasted fine oaks and maples and an excellent lawn. The house was a little forward of the centre, leaving ample room in the rear for such things as vegetable gardens, a tiny vineyard, a half-dozen fruit trees, a chicken house, and of course the stables. These things enlisted only Minnie's duty interest. But the front and sides she had planted and planned very well indeed, with a natural eye for colour and grouping.

Nearly every evening, during the season and when the weather was good, they made these excursions; following an almost unvarying route. Each enjoyed the place thoroughly, but after different fashions.

"The slope of the lawn to the street is very good," said Minnie, "but I'm not sure that sometime we won't decide to terrace it with stone walls. I believe it would give distinction."

"I guess Ezra hasn't noticed that water faucet is leaking," replied Fred. "All it needs is a washer; he can do it himself."

"Yes," agreed Minnie, "and then, if we did that, we could plant a double hedge leading to the side door with broad steps between the terrace levels."

"By George!" cried Fred, "look at the skirting on the foundation wall! I told Perkins he ought to put stone in there. You never can prevent dry rot so near the ground. I must have him come up and put in some new flashing."

"And," pursued Minnie, "on the middle terrace we could plant the hedge to make a circle and have a little fountain there. It should be rather a flat fountain; perhaps with a few pond lilies. I believe you can grow them in sunken tubs. There might be some sort of an effect possible with yew trees there, too. I heard of a new kind of yew yesterday that——"

"This part of the lawn looks pretty scrubby," Fred remarked. "I don't know but what it ought to be reseeded."

"We might plant a clump of barberries," Minnie speculated, "a long narrow sort of clump."

"Gutter needs weeding bad," grunted Fred. He was enjoying himself thoroughly, and was as proud as Punch of the whole place and pleased with its appearance and maintenance. This minute picking up of things out of order and things wrong was not fault-finding: merely that all Fred did *not* mention he found perfect.

But Minnie's planning began at last to penetrate his consciousness. He had put a lot of money and time into this place, and now apparently Minnie wasn't satisfied with it at all. A mist of disappointment fogged Fred's comfortable satisfaction. Heaven knows he wanted everything to be as she wanted it. If he had the money he'd never think twice of telling her to go ahead, but——

"A trellis along the south boundary," she was saying, "much better for the grapes, and it would cut off the view there, which isn't inspiring."

"Good heavens, Minnie," Fred burst out, "do you realize what all that would cost?"

Minnie came back to earth and surveyed his dismayed and hurt countenance with a certain amused astonishment.

"You poor boy," she cried, "*haven't* you got used to me yet? I haven't the slightest idea of doing any of it, at least not for years and years. I love the place as it is. But don't you think it is fun to 'suppose'?"

"You know, dear," pursued Fred, quite unswerved, "that I'd like to get you anything in the world you want, but——"

"I know; I know!" cried Minnie, implanting a flying kiss on his cheek. "I was just having my kind of fun."

"We *might* put in the trellis," conceded Fred, still pursuing his idea. "I think I could figure on that."

"I tell you I don't *want* the trellis, you old dear!" repeated Minnie, a little vexed, "nor any of the other things."

"Well," grumbled Fred, "I don't think you realize that if you were to plant all the things you have said you were going to plant, and built all the things you've talked of building, we'd have about a hundred thousand acres——"

His uneasiness died slowly in distant rumblings to the effect that in time she should have all she desired; have patience; the business was improving.

Nevertheless, his attitude had given to her otherwise wholly baseless and fanciful planning a certain connection with possibility.

They had by now arrived at the stable where, in accordance with their custom, they separated. Fred always had much masculine consultation with Ezra. Minnie sped back to the house. There she went at once into executive session with the cook. Minnie had been smitten with another idea.

IV

Life is a series of compromises; life is a never-ending education. Minnie long and tactfully had been working on these lines. Fred had about his social desires a certain simple practical directness which Minnie felt should be modified by both compromise and education. She had not yet persuaded him to a dinner coat for home dinners, but she had already brought him at least to tolerate many of what he called fancy frills.

Soup—to take it on the gastronomic side—was one of these; or entrées or salads or unusual vegetables or anything of that sort. Fred ate because he had a good hearty hunger, and he objected to having that hunger surreptitiously sapped and undermined by trifles until, when the real solid *food* at last appeared, it had been almost destroyed.

To-night's dinner began directly with the roast. On the platter with it were whole potatoes that had been browned in the pan with the meat. Flanking the platter was a capacious "boat" full of brown gravy. The only things passed by the maid were bread and a deep dish of macaroni au gratin, soft and creamy

within. Fred had a large cup of coffee. The other course was a solid bread pudding full of raisins with meringue atop.

This was something like. Fred helped himself liberally and ate with enjoyment. Little was said; Fred was too busy and Minnie too preoccupied.

"Now that's what I call real food," stated Fred as he folded his napkin.

"Let's have a fire," she suggested, as they prepared to settle themselves in the "den."

"Fire!" echoed Fred, astonished, "isn't it pretty early in the season for a fire?"

"But it's so cheerful. Let's light it this once whether we need it or not. No, sit still: I'll do it. Light your cigar and be comfy."

She touched a match to the fire, turned down the lights, and seated herself opposite Fred's worn old leather easy chair.

"I got a telegram from Freeman just before dinner," she began then. "He's coming next week instead of the week after."

"Sooner the better," said Fred hospitably.

"We ought to do something for him pretty promptly," she pursued.

"Sounds reasonable," agreed Fred. "Go after it: you're the social agitator."

"I thought," went on Minnie, "that we might give a small dinner, Friday, for just a few, and then have a gang in afterward to meet him."

"Sounds reasonable," repeated Fred. It did. So far the plan was standard. "Who'd you have at dinner?" enquired Fred.

Minnie named seven people. Fred aroused his slumbering forces, galloped up all his guns and swung them into position, sent back a hurry call for all reserves of ammunition.

"How about Cousin Jim?" he demanded. "You didn't mention him?"

"Oh, he wouldn't enjoy it," replied Minnie carelessly.

"Now look here, Honey," urged Fred with ponderous earnestness. "I know you think Cousin Jim is sometimes awkward at a nice party, and he's older than the people you are inviting, and it's a small dinner, and all that; but after all he is Family, and I don't think he ought to be left out, especially since it's to meet your brother."

This was one of Fred's most cherished conventions, loyalty to

the Family, not in the sense of being proud of it, but of sticking by it. The fact that the whole visible Family consisted of Cousin Jim, who was about as distantly related as it was possible to be, did not alter the principle of the situation, though possibly it helped it practically at times. These were the subjects on which Fred would give battle. As the least conventional of human beings, he naturally held the more tenaciously to the few conventions he did acknowledge. His port fires were all burning and his banners waving. He did not want to destroy non-combatants, but it should be done if necessary.

"Of course I'd ask him," stated Minnie negligently, "but he's to be gone duck shooting all next week."

This was terrible. Fred's guns were trained on an innocent pastoral scene. He had to unlimber them and send them to the rear as inconspicuously as possible, and issue a lot of counter commands. It left him somewhat in confusion.

Minnie, like the good general she was, took instant advantage of his discomfiture to launch her attack.

"Receptions are so dreary," she said. "I'd like to give a little dance. The young people would enjoy it so much, and Freeman would get so much better acquainted with them."

"Wicky is out of town next week, too," objected Fred, mentioning by nickname the German pianist always engaged for all small dances in Little Falls. "He wouldn't miss the duck opening, either."

"I thought I'd get Zinsdorf's orchestra."

"But great guns!" cried Fred. "You'd have to give it at the Country Club. This house is too cut up for a big dance."

Minnie rose to the frontal attack.

"There's the third story," she suggested calmly.

Fred was puzzled. "You mean the attic?"

"Now listen," Minnie bent forward eagerly, unleashing the attack. "It's a big place: you've no idea how big until you go look at it with this idea in mind. It's almost perfect for the purpose, and it's going to waste as it is." She talked fast, detailing the advantages of the third story; overwhelming Fred's practical objections almost before they were formulated. The floor could be covered with builder's paper and canvas. The orchestra could be put in the dark alcove by the water tank. Minnie guaranteed to get the place wired for lights. She described in bewildering and minute detail just how she could with

coloured bunting and curtain decorations conceal the naked framework and transform the whole place into a brilliant tent-like affair. It would be the first private ballroom in Little Falls: such a thing had never been dreamed of before.

Fred, overwhelmed, was forced to fall back to his single main line of defence.

"But, Honey!" he protested, "have you thought what it would cost?"

"I know it will be an expensive party," she acknowledged, "but we've never given a real party since we were married—only little dinners. And it isn't as if it were all money thrown away on the moment: we'd always have the ballroom. I do so *want* to do it!"

"And I want you to have everything you want, you know that, Honey," said Fred, troubled. "But a private ballroom—that's a rich man's luxury."

"It wouldn't cost any more than the trellis," Minnie pointed out. "Let's do this instead of the trellis."

The main line of defence seemed to have a weakness in it somehow. Fred felt vaguely that he had never really expected to have a trellis either, but he could not figure it out precisely.

Minnie, having penetrated the line, was busily engaged in the finishing off.

"We'll have a German," she proceeded. "Nobody has ever given one in Little Falls. It's a wonderful chance, having Freeman here, for he is a wonderful cotillion leader. We won't have to get many more favours: I can use all those things I got last year in the city. I was going to give them away for Christmas or use them as dinner favours or something; but they'll be just the thing."

"I knew those things would bring trouble!" sighed Fred. "They looked 'artistic.'"

CHAPTER III

I

FREEMAN'S train arrived at one-thirty. Minnie alone was awaiting him on the platform. Nowadays golf has loosened up the business man's ideas so that he thinks little of taking time off for almost any purpose; but in Little Falls of the late 'eighties such a thing was not even considered. Fred might have met the train had it borne the corpse of his best friend, but not otherwise. Little Falls had just achieved the dignity of a train shed and gateways, so Minnie had to wait outside in true cosmopolitan style.

She caught sight of Freeman at once; and was proud of the satisfactory figure he made as he stood for a moment looking coolly about him. There were no redcaps in those days, only an elderly coloured man who shambled around answering questions, directing the country bumpkin, guiding the aged, and otherwise making himself useful. It was characteristic of Freeman that without raising a finger in summons he, of all the crowd, annexed this person and exclusively appropriated him to his suitcases and a bag of golf sticks. Remembering that this was the late 'eighties you can appreciate the moral effect of the golf sticks.

Freeman was tall, slender, darkly and mysteriously aristocratic looking. He had dressed himself in the height of the fashion of those days, now much affected by vaudeville artists aspiring to be comic; the salient features of which were a low derby of the fried-egg order, shoes that went out some inches beyond his toes to sharp toothpick points and pearl-gray "spats" or gaiters. His collar was so extraordinarily high it looked as though it would be very uncomfortable on anybody else but Freeman. He bore a cane, across the crook of which one glove was carefully folded. The other he wore. His manner was perfect. It did not attempt to conceal his realization that he was somewhat superior to the ordinary run, but it assumed that this was quite natural, and that he was willing to be reasonable about it.

His eye fell on Minnie as he passed through the grille, and its depths kindled with a real pleasure. The leisurely tempo of his step, however, did not hasten; nor did the calm correctness of his expression change. Freeman, you must remember, had not only his clothes but dear old Harvard to sustain.

They moved through the station, Minnie telling him that Fred was sorry he had not been able to come, and had sent his best, and the rest of it; the coloured person prancing proudly along behind, visibly scorning the shawled women with bundles and babies and the peanut eaters of his usual duty. To Minnie's relief she found Ezra not talking to anybody.

Once seated in the coupé Freeman could relax the high front of his public appearance.

"You're looking well, Sis," said he. "That gown suits you. But you seem nervous as a witch. And why the hurry-up telegram?"

"I *am* excited," agreed Minnie. "I've created a ballroom out of nothing, and written and sent out a bushel of invitations, and got an orchestra, and arranged for refreshments and decorations and all the rest in less than a week."

Freeman allowed an expression that, his mirror had assured him, expressed polite puzzlement to flit across his face.

"I didn't tell you, did I?" Minnie went on. "It's a ball—for you—to-night. And we're going to have a cotillion, and you are to lead it."

Freeman's rather indolent and well-ordered mind recoiled. He had none of Minnie's hustling, knock-down-the-odds spirit. Such few serious activities as a cultivated man could permit himself should have their due periods of gestation, their preludes, their vistas of proper anticipation, their antechambers of contemplation in which one could duly get used to the idea, so to speak. He entered protest. It was impossible: it couldn't be done in the time. Minnie interrupted to ask why. Freeman could not state why exactly, except that obviously it was impossible because there wasn't time.

"Time for what?" demanded Minnie. "All *you* have to do is to unpack your dress suit and get into it."

"But the figures——"

"Mattie Walker, the cleverest girl in town, will be at the house at half-past two, and you two can go over the figures together. She is a screaming little beauty, too, Free."

Freeman's reluctance visibly weakened.

"I *do* so want this to go well. It's positively and actually the very first cotillion ever given in this city. I want you to show them how it should be done."

This was a seductive idea. Instruction by example, especially glittering and prominent example, might not prove unpleasant.

"That's rather a nice bit in the pediment," Freeman commented on the soldier's memorial they were then passing. The change of subject of course showed how little Minnie's last remark had really meant to him. "But why the rush?" he complained again.

Minnie had been reflecting and had decided.

"I never told you of Cousin Jim, did I?"

"Nothing special: you've mentioned him."

"Well, I wanted to give this ball while he is away."

"Have to invite him?"

"Absolutely. He is the only Kirby around here."

"Well, why not let him come? Everybody has poor relations. Let him lurk around the punch bowl."

"If he only would! But, Freeman, I'm *so* anxious to have this go well! I want things to be *correct* for once. And nothing is sure when Cousin Jim is about."

"What does he do? Break the furniture?"

"I don't know what he does," complained Minnie, at a loss. "He is terribly ignorant of anything to do with good form, but that isn't exactly it. You never know what he is going to do or say next. And the trouble is so many people laugh at him and pretend to look at him as an 'odd character'! Odd character! They wouldn't think him quite such an odd character if he was in *their* family!"

Minnie was plainly becoming excited over the memory of past mortifications.

"Well, he's out of the way this time, you say," Freeman pointed out. "Do you know, I find the effect of these shade trees most charming."

But Minnie, having made her point, was free to become conscience-stricken.

"Poor Cousin Jim!" she sighed. "He isn't really so much to blame. If Sara had lived he would have been very different. She was his wife, and she died after they had been married a little over a year. Before that Cousin Jim was in business, and doing

very well, they tell me, with good prospects. He retired at once and hasn't done a thing since. I think her death turned him a little queer. They say he looked at her for a long time as she lay there, without a tear; and then as he turned away he said: 'I've got to find out about this.' That sounds a little queer, don't you think?"

"Evidently. Must be a gloomy old party," said Freeman, merely to say something. His interest in Cousin Jim was very slight.

But Minnie had considerable arrears of guilty conscience to work off before she would feel quite square over this arrangement.

"He isn't gloomy a bit," she protested. "He is really an old darling, when he behaves. No one would want to hurt his feelings for the world. If *only* he would not be so queer and blunt and say and do such *gauche* things!"

But Freeman's attention had wandered to a more important subject.

"How about pressing my clothes?" he demanded.

II

They ascended the stairs at once to examine the new ballroom. "It's a makeshift, remember," Minnie apologized, as she turned on the lights.

Freeman looked about him for a few moments without comment.

"It's a mighty good makeshift, then," he decided at last. "I should make it shift permanently."

Minnie's spirit glowed. She had really worked hard. The roof of the house was very high and peaked to shed the heavy snows. This pitch had been cleverly utilized in the hanging of coloured stuffs so that the final effect was what one would imagine the interior of a Persian royal tent or pavilion to be, provided the owner thereof could be conceived to have captured in distant battles a number of Chinese fish-skin lanterns and a hundred or so wooden folding undertaker's chairs.

"Of course a hardwood floor would be better," said Minnie, "but there wasn't time. Here are the favours all laid out, and a list of them. I'm going to leave you. When Mattie Walker comes, just introduce yourself; only don't spend the afternoon flirting with her. I'll send a girl in ten minutes to get your dress suit to press."

She left him at his room, and immediately submerged herself in an ocean of details. There were no really trained servants then, except in the largest cities. Minnie had to set and decorate her own dinner table; she must arrange and place her own flowers; she must superintend the moving of all the furniture; she must direct the twining of the smilax and the locating of potted palms. And in addition, she had to plan and impress every detail of the cooking and serving of dinner, not to speak of the customary new surprise dish or so, to the cooking of which she had to bring her own personal flusteration. Giving a battle was nothing to fighting a party, unless it was a single-handed battle in a bad dream. On the great day she would work with the executive efficient pseudo-calm of high nervous tension until the last instant; then hastily "slip on" her gown, snap savagely at her bewildered husband, and descend to greet people with a charming though distraught smile. This same smile would stay with her through dinner, offered in lieu of real attention to her dinner partners. The external woman would be as charming a target as possible to be talked at: the real woman would be vigilantly following the rehearsed steps of the function and fearing the worst.

III

Thus it was with Minnie. But there could be no doubt that this was a real party. There was Freeman, and there was extra help, and there were other indications that a highly rarefied altitude of social converse would be appropriate. The dinner guests played up. They talked not only to Freeman, but to each other, in a most satisfyingly conventional manner. Everything went very well. Fred even remembered not to come trailing along after, when the ladies retired.

But the after-dinner smokes were cut rather short by first dance arrivals. A hurry call ravished away Freeman and Fred to the receiving line. People were streaming in. Some of them had come in private carriages, and a few in public cabs; but a great many had walked, the women with their skirts tucked up under their wraps, fleece-lined "party boots" over their slippers, and veils bound over their hair. It was a simple age and the distances were short. They mounted immediately to the second-floor bedrooms where they laid aside their wraps and prinked and delayed, waiting for some bold spirit to be the first to go down.

Finally the bold spirit made the awesome break. People began to squeeze down the narrow stairs past more people ascending.

The Kirbys and Freeman stood in a row just inside the drawing room. Guests came up, were introduced, passed on. An ebullient wave of animation and cordiality began to well up in them as they entered the drawing-room door. It bubbled over as they greeted the receiving line. It came off the boil completely as they passed on and stood around in subdued little groups. Mattie Walker and Camilla and Kitty Cadwell circulated about, under instruction and as in honour bound.

The distant strains of music came from far upstairs. People looked surprised. What was the idea? Then, again under instruction, Camilla spread the news. They were to go upstairs; there was a new ballroom. The extra servants who had waited at table came in bearing dance cards on trays. The young men burst into activity. It behooved one to fill his numbers early and cannily. The cards, by the way, occasioned a buzz of pleased comment from the women: the men were too busy to notice them. They also were a shattering novelty, in vellum—one page full of dances listed by name—waltz, polka, schottische; the second page, after "supper," was simply marked "Cotillion."

Minnie's anxiously tense spirit began at last to expand. The dinner had gone off well and on the very correctest of lines. The novelty of the cards—so like Minnie Kirby!—had made a satisfactory small impression. But the ballroom paralyzed them, knocked their eyes out, hit 'em dead! The surprise was complete. For some time people just walked about exclaiming. The table of favours and properties for the cotillion figures was a centre of interest. Soon the music struck up again and Freeman swung gracefully out on the floor with Mattie Walker.

He and Mattie were hitting it off very well. Minnie usually, like all other women, looked rather askance at Mattie. That young lady cruised her own course and flew her own flag in masculine seas. But to-night Minnie felt grateful to her. She and Freeman were experts at the game; though they played it from different angles. They both knew that the unchangeable basic ingredient must be personal interest and flattery, but each had an individual method of application. Both were aware that a reserve of mystery must be maintained. Freeman's interpretation was an ardour faintly modified by a detached remnant of the critical faculty, no matter what the circumstances. He paid des-

perate attentions, but with something held back. Mattie, on the contrary, was all vivacity and provocativeness. Her mystery consisted solely in keeping him guessing as to how far she would really go. And they both danced divinely.

Freeman was not only a comfort, he was a wonder. He had written his name down on Mattie's card for the first dance and supper dance only. The second he had with Minnie. The rest he had distributed partly by choice and instinct, partly by hint from Minnie; but several he had kept blank as what might be called a tact fund. With these he rescued wall flowers. He also danced with Kitty Cadwell and Mrs. Dunning. The modern young man would have discerned nothing remarkable in that, for they were both young, good looking, lively, well-gowned, and good dancers; but in the 'eighties married women might just as well have worn caps and crutches and be done with it as far as young men were concerned. He even insisted on sitting out one whole number with Old Lady Watkins, whom his unerring instinct indicated as the most important dowager.

The old lady protested regally, informing him in no uncertain terms that his place was with the young people on the floor. Freeman protested that he was doing just exactly what he wanted to do; and proceeded to make himself fascinating. The down-right old dowager was not fooled for a moment, but she liked it just the same.

On the floor the "dancing men" were very busy with the unmarried girls. Occasionally one of the married men took a turn or so with his own or someone else's wife. Even more occasionally he managed to get a chance at a young girl; in which case the latter considered that the waste of time struck rather a fine balance with the merit acquired. For the most part, however, he foregathered with his fellows around the punch bowl, or to smoke among the hats and coats in the dressing room. The married women, old and young, sat looking on and gossiping. Not to dance meant nothing to them, whereas a girl without a filled card was in an unenviable position. Therefore, it was considered most unsportsmanlike for a married woman to dance with a young man.

Altogether it was a wonderful party. A gradually built up atmosphere of fine formalism lifted the occasion from the habitual social level of Little Falls to a higher exotic plane. To-morrow all these people would again meet one another in full knowledge

of the foibles, the mannerisms, the wearisomenesses, the meanesses of each; but for this one night they encountered as noble participants in high emprise.

Minnie, dashing below, found that her assistance was working well. Everywhere small folding tables had been placed and laid out for supper. The larger table of honour had been moved into the drawing room. Camilla, somewhat flushed, but even more voluble than usual, overwhelmed her with reassuring details. The proper silverware was in place; the fancy "crackers" with their excruciatingly funny paper caps inside had not been forgotten. There were also many imitation fruits. These were the especial Minnie-esque surprise of the supper, for when their stems were lighted they were supposed to emit a shower of "white sparks of great brilliancy and beauty, guaranteed harmless. Will not burn the table linen."

"I'm sure I hope so," said Minnie doubtfully. "It would be dreadful to burn a hole in someone's party gown."

Camilla's heaven-born optimism detached all doubts and swept them miles downstream on a flood of conversation. Minnie gave her a hasty kiss of compunction before she sped back.

"You ought to be dancing, dear," she said.

But Camilla would have none of it. She loved fixing tables; somebody had to do it; Minnie's place was with her guests; she intended to dance the German: and so on, with entire sincerity.

IV

Parties began early in those days. The first guests had arrived only a little after eight o'clock. Supper was announced before midnight. The assembly trooped down the stairs. Minnie floated about, drinking her fill of exclamations over the arrangements of the tables, the daring use of ribbons laid flat, the quaint parroquets of cardboard perched on the edges of the water glasses, the mysterious-looking table fireworks. People began to group themselves and find places with a pleasing hum of minor excitement.

The only arrangement Minnie had made toward assigning places was at the large round table of honour in the drawing room. Here the parroquets' bills held cards inscribed with the names of twelve of the brightest and liveliest of the young people. Freeman sat next to Mattie Walker, of course.

The Japanese napkins rustled as they were unfolded. Men

servants began to bring in large trays of oyster patties. Suddenly Old Lady Watkins, who happened to face the door and who had been high-headedly surveying things like a benevolent chicken hawk, gave a short laugh and exclaimed:

"Oh, poor Minnie!"

The others at her table turned to look. The movement attracted Freeman's notice, and he asked of Mattie:

"Who is that?"

Minnie, who had eyes for nothing but the big table, caught his question and the direction of his glance. She arose hastily.

Cousin Jim was entering the room. He wore his customary baggy brown suit which looked rather baggier than usual in contrast not only to the festal dress of the company but to the artificial festal atmosphere. He carried by the necks a number of mallard ducks, obviously recently cleaned. For a moment he hesitated, peering about, then caught sight of Minnie. His voice cut heartily through the lighter hum of conversation and laughter with somewhat the sacrilegious effect of one speaking aloud and unecclesiastically in a church.

"Hullo, Minnie!" he greeted her. "I saw by the lights you were giving a party, so I stopped in on my way from the train. Brought you a few ducks."

Minnie crossed to him, her eyes sparkling with vexation, but a fixed smile on her lips.

"I didn't know you were coming back until next week," she said, "Freeman came a week earlier than at first expected, and I wanted to get him started off right, so I had to hurry my plans." She spoke in a low voice. Cousin Jim's reply was perfectly audible.

"The danged weather was too warm," Cousin Jim explained cheerfully. "No ducks to amount to anything. Not worth staying."

"I'm so sorry I didn't know," Minnie babbled on, still squarely blocking the way. "If you'd only happened to take the noon train you would have been here in time for the party."

Cousin Jim's eyes twinkled and he laughed.

Several people half smiled in spite of themselves. It was thoroughly realized that Cousin Jim was reprehensible but he did have a cheerful laugh. Old Lady Watkins, who always said what she meant, leaned over and remarked to Bert Cadwell, whose conventional soul was suffering agonies on Minnie's account:

"Well, no one could believe in original sin who ever heard that man laugh."

"Bless you," Cousin Jim replied heartily to Minnie. "I'm not entirely out of luck: I'm here for the part that appeals to me most. I'm as hungry as a bear. I'll just put these ducks in the icebox and wash up and come right back and get something to eat."

"Yes, do," urged Minnie, herding him out of the room, and glad of that much respite. She made frantic signals to the anxiously hovering Camilla, who made reassuring signals in reply. When the unwelcome guest had returned, Minnie attempted again to take him in charge.

"You must be positively starved, Cousin Jim," she chattered, "I've got a special spread fixed up just for you in the den."

Cousin Jim laughed again.

"Bless your heart, Minnie," he cried, "I didn't expect to get anything. You've forgotten I haven't met the young man yet."

Camilla, waiting near the den to take charge, saw him move, "like a juggernaut" her excited mind phrased a certain inexorable-ness, in the direction of the drawing room, Minnie still talking feverishly. They disappeared. In ten seconds Minnie returned. As she passed through the door she half collapsed against the wall. Instantly Camilla, cooing sympathetically, flew to her side.

"You poor dear!" she murmured.

Minnie was close to hysterics, and clung to her without thought of possible damage to their gowns.

"I knew it! I knew it!" she wailed. "And everything was going so beautifully!"

"And you've worked so hard!" cried Camilla. Camilla's sympathy always tended to accelerate the situation, whatever it was, never to check it by discovering compensation. She always said "isn't it dreadful," rather than "it isn't as bad as it seems."

"*Anybody* would have taken the hint!" raged Minnie. "Anybody! I told him at last flatly that he shouldn't go into the parlour because he wasn't dressed for a party. What do you suppose he said?"

"Something perfectly dreadful, of course."

"He looked at himself a little surprised, as though he had not noticed. 'That's so, Minnie,' he said, 'but don't let that worry you for a minute: I don't mind a bit'; and in he marched in spite of me! *He* didn't mind!" She laughed wildly. "And then he

brought up a chair and planted himself right between Freeman and Mattie!"

"Well, everybody knows him. He really doesn't make any difference," said Camilla, but without conviction.

"No, no! That's where you're wrong. The King of England couldn't make more difference in a room than Cousin Jim. I don't know why it is. Twenty people can join a group and you'll never notice it, but the minute Cousin Jim appears it's *different*! And the Lord only knows what he'll say or do!"

She looked as though she might next beat her head against the wall. Camilla began to be alarmed.

"Everybody knows Cousin Jim," she repeated. "He's such a character."

"Character!" raved Minnie. "It's very quaint to have a character about unless you happen to be responsible for him! How would you like to be continually excusing somebody in your family on the ground that he is 'quaint'?"

"I shouldn't," admitted Camilla.

"And the worst of it is," wailed Minnie, "that he *can* be so charming when he wants to be. It isn't that he doesn't know. I've told him again and again, and he agrees with me, but it runs off him like water. He never seems to remember overnight, but at times when you get him alone he's simply charming. That's what's so exasperating! If he *only* had a little social tact; if you *only* could rely on his not doing or saying something awful——"

"It's like those people who would be such wonders if just they didn't drink," said Camilla with unexpected sagacity, "only they do drink."

The storm was passing, but it had extinguished all Minnie's stars.

"I suppose I've got to make the best of it," she sighed. "I suppose I've got to go back; but I'm positively afraid to."

V

Cousin Jim was getting on very well. The light-hearted youngsters at the big table, with the exception of Freeman, felt no responsibility for the harmonious conventions save as to their own most important persons; and they all liked the excitement of having the unexpected happen. Cousin Jim greeted them all jovially and at once began cheerful talk. With one sweeping gesture he cleared aside the cumbering table decorations directly

in front of him to make room for the food, which same he devoured indiscriminately as it came, without paying the slightest attention to what it might be. Corned beef and cabbage would have done quite as well, thought Minnie bitterly.

But for all that Cousin Jim was in his charming mood. He expressed quite nicely his pleasure at meeting Freeman, even half apologizing for his dress; or rather, half explaining it. That young man, whose society instincts had been ruffled not only on his own account but because of his sister, replied very coolly that he could imagine that radical inappropriateness might be very uncomfortable. Cousin Jim flicked an amused and speculative eye on him. The young people held their breaths in joyous anticipation, the older people in an agony of dread. This was the sort of occasion when you could not tell what Cousin Jim was likely to say: he had sometimes a perverted sense of humour. However, he said nothing, but began at once a bantering interchange with the girls about the table. They enjoyed him hugely, and came back at him in kind as hard as they could, but generally got the worst of it. Really, if Cousin Jim had been properly dressed, and had not been known as Cousin Jim, he would have been considered a great asset to that party. There was no question about one thing: the party was different. Cousin Jim had arrived. That fact had made its decided impact on every consciousness present. Some were sitting in an agony of anxiety for the integrity of the spirit of convention which had earlier in the evening so successfully established itself. Others were amused at what they considered Minnie's predicament. At the smaller tables conversation was spasmodic and irrelevant. People talked from the surface of their minds and listened with one ear. The other ear and all of their attention were cocked toward the big table. Freeman sensed it, and self-consciously tried to indicate his detachment from this disgracefully informal hilarity.

Beneath it all ran a strong current of excitement. The effect, whether good or bad, was certainly a keying up of vital consciousness. The essential and underlying characteristics of each seemed to be heightened, accentuated. The formal became yet more elaborately formal; the vapid more insipidly vapid; the aggressive fumed and raged within, arousing themselves to combat Cousin Jim should he trot out any of his heresies; and the spiritually inert began at once to throw up the defences of dull resentment by which spiritual inertia always protects itself against that which might

awaken it. Some few even whispered to each other, a little shamefacedly, that they sort of liked Cousin Jim after all, and hastened to qualify with an "of course, but——" It was agreed that his jokes often lacked good taste; perhaps that he himself lacked finer sensibilities. It was also agreed that if he had not lost Sara she would have made a different man of him and certainly would not have allowed him to waste his time with all sorts of people, many of them not even of his own class—— They stopped murmuring and pricked up their ears. Cousin Jim was veering dangerously.

He had turned again to address directly the aloof and exquisite Freeman, blowing that young man's complacency out of water by an unexpected and intimately critical reference to two Broadway plays.

"We'll get them here one of these days—with a road company," he said, "and we'll try to guess what they must have been like originally. That's one of the drawbacks to living out of the world, our lack of good plays and music." Cousin Jim twinkled, and added, "But of course we have our well-known maple trees, which no doubt you've had pointed out to you."

People stirred uneasily. This was the sort of thing. Did not amount to much; but made a bad impression. Why do it?

"They certainly give the town a very beautiful appearance," replied Freeman, trying to indicate that while involved, he was in no way responsible.

"City, my boy; not town. That is a very important point. You are not yet aware of the fact that we have twenty-seven miles of street railways, and lead the world in our manufacture of coal stoves, and travel more miles per capita than any other place of our size in the country. But despair not: these and other things will be conveyed to you in due time and often, by many people."

He laughed joyously, and so did the irreverent youngsters who had no sense of responsibility and liked to encourage Cousin Jim. The older people, as being more experienced, became still more uneasy. Freeman was most correct.

"I am certain I shall find it all most interesting," said he politely.

"Are you so?" responded Cousin Jim. "But there's one thing you need nobody to tell you. When it comes to pretty girls we take a back seat for nobody. Isn't that so, Mattie?"

"Do you expect me to disagree?" asked Mattie pertly. "However, I'll give you full leave to say anything you want to about us, Cousin Jim; but I don't give Mr. Farnum full leave to believe it all!"

At this moment a waiter placed something on the table. It was an evil moment, for Cousin Jim happened to glance up.

"Why, hullo!" he exclaimed in surprise. "This *is* a blow-out, isn't it!" He turned to Freeman in mock confidence. "You ought to feel flattered, young man. You are having a Class A party given for you. There are various ways of telling, but I'll give you the best tip: whenever you see that fellow there, you'll know it's a sure-enough, bang-up, twenty-four carat show. He's the head waiter at the Porter Hotel and is not lightly to be ravished away from his lawful occupation." Cousin Jim looked after the man's retreating back and added thoughtfully: "I know him well. He's a darn good shot: I've been out with him often. Do you shoot?"

"No," replied Freeman shortly. He was trying to hold the poise of a superior man faintly amused by vagaries; and surprisingly he was not finding it easy.

"Pity," was Cousin Jim's comment, "I could give you some good sport on duck and partridge. His name is Myers. I was talking to him the other day, and I find he's been around here ever since he was a boy and says you used to find partridge as near as Burton Lake. He used to work for your grandfather, Carrie," he suddenly addressed a very ornate and languid beauty, "when he was keeping the butcher shop on Fourth Street."

Now a shock of embarrassment fell. Young people laugh free-heartedly at the mishandling of any conventions but their own, and youth's conventions are arbitrary. There is a short period when every man's value in the world is gauged by the hang of his trousers. Suddenly the realization was brought home to them that there was a stranger in their midst before whom nakedness was being exposed. Carrie flushed deeply and helplessly.

Cousin Jim's quick perceptions saw instantly her distress. He turned directly to Freeman.

"This has been until very recently a pioneer country," he said. "I can myself remember when Indians used to come in to trade. The old timers who came first had to buckle right in on anything that came to hand and had to be done. I believe the first Kirby

here was at the same time a blacksmith and a college man. It was inspiring the way some of the gently bred women worked at their cooking, their washing, and their spinning wheels."

Carrie looked a little relieved, but not wholly happy. Minnie arose and gave the signal for the return to the ballroom.

VI

Now at hand was the intended climax of the party. Most of those present had only a sketchy idea as to how a cotillion was danced. They lined the walls in pleased expectation. Freeman, with his two lieutenants, took charge. The plan was to work from the simplest figures into the more elaborate. Willie Trafford, his chief aide, fortunately had proved not only to be already familiar with cotillions in general, but also to be possessed of a loud voice and a talent for imparting didactic information. Later in life he became a senator. For the moment he was invaluable, for he relieved Freeman of the bustling loud bossing part of the job, which Freeman loathed. They ordered six couples to the floor. These were to dance until Freeman blew a whistle, when they were to separate, procure favours, and select other partners. This simple process was to be repeated until all were engaged.

As the first lot out were the precise twelve who had supped together, no staid decorum governed their actions when the whistle blew. They scurried breathlessly to the favour table, snatched what was offered them, and raced away to the partner of their choice. The girls were more deliberate than the boys; though they were carried away by the daring leap-year opportunity to come out openly on the predatory side. The boys hurried partly to obtain the partners they wanted, but principally to avoid having to dance with Grace Finch. It was realized somebody had to dance with her; she belonged to the gang. The only ones who took their time were Freeman and Mattie. Freeman was deliberate from disdain. Mattie selected her favour with care, then threaded her way through the dancing couples toward the wall where sat a row of youths so deeply engaged in fascinating conversation that they were totally unaware of her approach. She passed them by, to the instant destruction of the fascinating conversation, and with an exaggerated curtsy offered her favour to Cousin Jim.

Minnie registered mentally a total disapproval of Mattie as an interfering, forward little minx.

To the surprise of everyone, and to Minnie's further indignation, Cousin Jim accepted the favour and arose to dance. Nobody remembered having seen Cousin Jim dance, at least not since Sara's death. He made a most ridiculous figure, in Minnie's estimation, not only because of his dress, but also because of his high-hopping, round and round and round method of waltzing, an almost painful contrast to the smooth even glide of the modern mode. Mattie, the little devil, seemed to enjoy it. Although never before had she done this particular kind of a hop, her step fell into it as though she had never danced anything else. She chattered and laughed up mischievously into Cousin Jim's face in a manner that was positively brazen! She had no business doing such a thing: at least Cousin Jim might have had the sense to decline! Minnie said as much to him after the figure was over, rather jokingly but with an edge.

"Young ladies are too scarce and precious to waste on you older men. Just see the young fellows who had no partners!"

But Cousin Jim refused to be impressed. "Let 'em get popular, then—like me," said he.

This excursion of Mattie's started quite a vogue for Cousin Jim. For the first time the girls had a chance to show favour directly. They knew perfectly where that favour was supposed to fall, and it delighted their perverse souls to be able to shatter masculine complacency. Obviously the elegant young man from outside was It, but even the most impressed and fluttery sensed that it would do no one's cause any harm to fly a little mortifying rag of independence. Cousin Jim was made to order for the purpose. They had confidence he would play up to them: and he did. He joked and danced and laughed and almost kicked up his heels. He was having the time of his life.

Of course Freeman had plenty of partners, and of the best; but he was obviously second. It hardly made him seem ridiculous, but it did make him look out of key. To Minnie it was fairly maddening. In spite of her surface frankness, she had secretly wanted him to be surprised by the unexpected innate correctness of the Little Falls social instinct. He must be getting the impression of a rather rowdy atmosphere where forward girls romped with elderly men in sack suits at what should have been a beautifully harmonious function. The whole thing was missing fire.

But Minnie was not one to take it lying down. Between two

figures she bore down on Cousin Jim with a forced smile on her face but with grim determination in her heart.

"Look here, Cousin Jim," she told him firmly. "You are altogether too popular. I'm simply going to make you give some of these bashful youngsters a chance. Do you realize that you are absolutely the only older person on the floor?"

Cousin Jim looked about him with an air of surprise.

"Why so I am!" he cried, "I hadn't thought of it!"

An elfish fairy danced through the forbidding barrage of Minnie's glare and dangled a favour in front of his eyes.

"No, thank you, my dear," refused Cousin Jim kindly, "I'm busy just now."

He nodded to Minnie and glided away along the wall. She returned to her seat at the favour table in triumph. At least she'd settled that.

But Cousin Jim had drunken deeply of the wine of youth. His objective on leaving Minnie proved to be the concealed orchestra, with the leader of which he conversed as soon as the dance was finished.

A trumpet sounded a call. Minnie's heart plunked to the hundred fathom mark as she saw Cousin Jim stalk to the middle of the floor and hold up his hand for the attention he already abundantly possessed.

"Announcing the revolt of age!" cried Cousin Jim. "Youth has its day—and most of the night. It has been pointed out to me that while the married folks have been *asked* to this party, and have been *fed* at this party, they haven't had the ghost of a chance to *dance* at this party. We know that youth is the season for dancing—That's right, laugh! I know how many years old I am; you can't tell me anything there. But I know how many years young I am, too; and that's where I've got you!—As I was saying; we know that youth is the season for dancing; and we're willing to give 'em the chance. But age must have its fling! We ask not much; but we ask something, and that something we will have! You youngsters can now retire. This next is to be a dance for married folks and married folks only. Go sit in a row against the wall, children, and give us the floor. Pretend you are older and tired and want-to-go-homier. One little ten minutes out of the whole night long is ours by rights; and here's where we take it! *Select your partners for the Virginia Reel!*"

He strode across the room and bowed low before Old Lady Watkins.

"May I have the honour?" he begged.

To the devastated astonishment of everybody the formidable old dowager accepted!

A moment before, the reception of Cousin Jim's proposal might have hung a little bit in doubt. People cast eyes toward Minnie. But with Old Lady Watkins on the floor all hesitation vanished. The double line was formed in a twinkling and with genuine enthusiasm. Only Minnie, Freeman, and Camilla were able to retain the correct aghast feeling. Fred thought Cousin Jim's idea was a capital one, and fell back completely bewildered by the scathing rebuff administered to his proposal that Minnie and he should dance the Reel together.

It was a success, there could be no doubt of that. The participants cut up more didoes than their immediate descendants would ever have dared: and the immediate descendants, lining the wall for once, wouldn't have missed the cheering spectacle for worlds. But the cotillion spirit went instanter to the dem-ni-tion bow-wows.

After this bust Cousin Jim suddenly decided to go home. He had only dropped in for a moment, he took pains to explain to Minnie, and he was getting too old to sit up till the lark. He was sorry to go before the rest, but he hoped Minnie would understand. Minnie bore up with astonishing fortitude.

The cotillion resumed, and continued to its appointed finale.

At last the wearied orchestra began *Home Sweet Home*. The guests commenced to take their leave in a flutter of pretty confusions and protestations. Carriages rolled away. Shrouded figures glided down the drive and up or down the darkness of the street.

Of these were Mattie Walker and Celia Atterbury with attendant but unimportant youths. The girls clung to each other, which forced their escorts to bring up the rear. Their talk was, naturally, of the party; and should in all logic have been of the glorious youth who had been the reason for its giving. But that was not the case.

"*Didn't* Cousin Jim put his foot in it!" cried Celia. "How *could* he be so blind!"

"Don't you fool yourself about Cousin Jim," said Mattie, in the reasonable, commonsense manner she reserved for her own

sex. "He's not so blind as you think. He had a naughty little twinkle in his eye."

"Mattie!" expostulated Celia, scandalized. "You don't think he *deliberately* tried to spoil poor Mrs. Kirby's party!"

"Of course not," quoth the wise damsel, "Cousin Jim wouldn't hurt a fly knowingly. Didn't you notice how he covered up his break about poor Carrie's grandmother?" She laughed. "Just the same, he *did* have a naughty little twinkle. Perhaps he thought it was good for Minnie."

"To spoil her beautiful party—after all the pains she took with it!"

"Perhaps he didn't think he was spoiling it: perhaps he thought he was—Oh, I don't know!" Mattie could no longer stand the strain. "Anyway, Cousin Jim's a wise old bird—a pretty wise old bird—don't get fooled on that!"

Then they began to exchange impressions as to the guest of honour.

CHAPTER IV

THOUGH the party had not broken up until nearly three o'clock, the Kirby household, with the exception of Freeman, was early afoot. Fred thought he had to be down to his business strictly at the usual time, party or no party. Minnie might have stopped abed, but she could not have done so with the knowledge of the horrible *mess* that must be cleared away before her house would be normally livable. Besides, her mind was still fevered with the excitement of diverse emotions of the party, like a champagne hangover.

For one thing, she must scold Cousin Jim. It was time he was fetched up with a round turn. There was no earthly reason why he should be considered especially privileged. She arose with the firm determination of doing something about it.

So insistent had become the necessity of getting it out of her system that she very nearly skimped even the preliminary supervision of the "setting to rights." Ordinarily Minnie would personally have slaved away to a point of nervous frenzy. In justice it should be pointed out that this kind of fool-judgment was not individual to Minnie. It was partly feminine, partly "what was expected." The standard would have kept Minnie on a nagging, essentially unimportant job within doors. Her necessity for disciplining Cousin Jim haled her forth. At least Cousin Jim got her into the open air, and it was a fine autumn day.

Cousin Jim lived in a queer little place around the corner from Prospect Street. It was a small cottage behind one tremendous gable. One could with difficulty avoid the thought that it started out to be a mansion but had become discouraged. It stood in a small lot bounded by a white picket fence. Cousin Jim was at the moment of Minnie's arrival raking up dead leaves. He saw her and greeted her from afar.

"Good morning to you! Just in time for the bonfire. I was afraid I'd have to have it all alone. The pesky wind blows the leaves all over the place so I can't save her until school lets out."

"Cousin Jim," said Minnie, ignoring all this, "I have come on a very serious errand. May I see you inside?"

Cousin Jim's laughing wrinkles sobered.

"Why, my dear, what has gone wrong?" he cried. "Come right in and tell me."

He let her into the one large room of the house, that occupied the whole of the gable—an attractive room in an untidy sort of fashion, with books, armchairs, pipes, magazines all over the place. Cousin Jim cleared out two of the armchairs and his hand fumbled for one of the pipes.

"What's the trouble?" he asked solicitously.

Minnie told him. She emphasized the fact that really Cousin Jim had come to a turning point in his career. He could from this moment either continue on his downward course, which would lead to consequences so obvious that Minnie omitted naming them; or he could by a tremendous effort and much searching of soul perform the acknowledgedly difficult feat of reformation that would lead him safely back to salvation.

Cousin Jim was plainly bewildered over all this, though relieved that Fred had not broken his leg nor Freeman fallen down a well. Minnie was so exasperated at last night's performance that she did not want to discuss it specifically, and her effort to keep to generalities made her somewhat vague. Her rhetorical treatment might have applied to any or all delinquencies from drug addiction to embezzlement.

"But what have I done!" cried Cousin Jim. "My goodness me, Minnie! You talk as if I were a secret drinker or something like that."

"It's about as bad," Minnie told him firmly, "in people's eyes and in its effect. I don't like to talk like this, Heaven knows; and I wouldn't want to hurt your feelings for worlds; but it's time somebody did it, and I seem to be the only one."

Cousin Jim held her with his glittering eye.

"Look at me, Minnie. I have searched the memories of a fairly tender conscience and I have not discovered my crime."

Minnie's patience gave way before this obtuseness. What was the use in trying to spare the man's feelings? Heaven knew he was careless enough of hers.

"It's the sort of thing you did last night," she hit him fairly.

"What did I do last night?"

Then Minnie told him. She pointed out, kindly but in de-

tail, in just how many ways Cousin Jim had offended. When Cousin Jim at last gathered the drift of the indictment the solicitude was replaced by relief and a faint amusement. He filled and lighted the pipe he had fumbled for and sat back in the arm-chair.

"Well, well!" he cried, when Minnie had paused, "I hadn't the slightest idea I was doing all that. I *am* sorry, if that's the way it struck you. But Minnie, I'm not so sure you've got the right slant on it. Conventions are all right: most conventions are kindly. But these miserable little flea-bite rules are unchristian conventions. There's no commonsense to them. It's the conventional thing for a man to lift his hat to a lady, and that comes from his chivalrous attitude toward the sex, and is a beautiful thing, the observance of which is good for a man's character. But what earthly sense is there in worrying whether you stick your right foot or your left foot out when you make the bow? Straitjackets—that's what these confounded little unchristian conventions are. I don't see why it's so darn aristocratic to put yourself in a straitjacket!"

Could anything be more hopeless? Minnie looked at him in despair. He had settled back in his chair fully prepared to enjoy an argument. Minnie's exasperation rose again.

"In any case," she snapped, "you might at least be considerate of other people's ideas on the subject."

"Well, that's just it," pursued Cousin Jim, comfortably. "You said a while ago that I spoiled your party. I think that's just a notion of yours. Parties are meant to have a good time at; and if people have a good time, then the party is a success. Doesn't matter what *kind* of a party it is, if people really get together. The more things that get people doing things *together* the better."

"Cousin Jim," said Minnie, with a short laugh, "I think when you attempt to criticize the usages of good society you are simply talking of things you know nothing whatever about."

Cousin Jim became as contrite as a setter dog.

"Oh, dear," he lamented, "I'm always hoping for a reasonable discussion of the relative merits of your penurious habits and my wasteful ones, but I get only strong disapproval."

He rolled his eye at her comically seeking a smile; but Minnie would not smile. Her penurious habits, his wasteful ones? What was the man talking about? But let that go. It was now or never. Minnie returned to the attack. Cousin Jim this time

seemed impressed: at least he dropped his attempted facetiousness.

"The trouble is, my dear," he said at last, "I get to looking at the sky, and so sometimes I'm clumsy as to where I put my feet. Forgive an old star-gazing codger. It's just the very things you worry about that aren't real and visible to me. It isn't inborn cussedness. You know that, don't you?"

Minnie's anger against Cousin Jim melted, while at the same time she bit her lip with another anger, this time against herself. Only one who would kick an abandonedly prostrate puppy in the stomach could smite Cousin Jim when he took this tack.

"If this is going to be a confession," he went on, "I may just as well admit that I've lost my hold on precisions of etiquette. I wonder if I could explain to you so you won't think me a worse fool than you do now." His brow was wrinkled and he rubbed the bridge of his nose, surveying Minnie with a comic despair. After a moment he shook his head. "The long and short of it is that I'm not that trick kind of a dog. I probably don't belong with the performing animals at all. I am griefstricken, and shall —temporarily—reform"—his eyes began to twinkle—"but I *did* enjoy your party!" he concluded.

Minnie returned home in a state of mental uncertainty. She had said all she had intended to say; Cousin Jim had been led to an apparently reasonable understanding of her point of view and had promised reform. Yet there seemed to be something lacking somehow.

CHAPTER V

I

LITTLE FALLS required two weeks to work Freeman into its system. That was about the length of time a guest could remain a guest. Two weeks was as long as Little Falls could stay top notch and dressed up. Then, the fever of hospitality having run its normal course, it suddenly allowed itself the luxury of figurative shirt sleeves.

By the end of the period mentioned everybody had entertained Minnie's brother in one way or another, but generally by large, elaborate, beautiful, and indigestible dinners. Approximately the same people appeared at each. Even the Cadwells had him in. They could not afford a dinner, with the service it would require, so they invited him to Sunday night supper.

Freeman's days had been spent very pleasantly. He had arisen late, to the great disorder of the household. Little Falls had not yet arrived at compensatory late rising in her spasmodic and brief seasons of dissipation: so that even the women had not thought of modifying their usual habits. The servants resented having to "keep breakfast warm." Fred, too, grumbled a bit; he could not see why Freeman should not get up as long as everybody else did; but Minnie had her way. After lunch the young man strolled, or visited the Country Club until calling time of the afternoon.

That was the epoch of the quaint custom of set calls. A guest—even as important a guest as a young man—was supposed to pay to his hostess a formal visit by way of acknowledgment, preferably within the week. If he did not make his "dinner call," he was quite likely to be disciplined. In addition young men made formal calls on young ladies. By that I do not mean calls for the pleasure of their bright eyes merely. Each youth had his "calling list" which he conceived it to be his duty to cover once in so often.

By the time calling hour was over, it was necessary to dress for that evening's function.

Then abruptly it was finished. Ezra and the spotty dog resumed their evening asphyxiation around the hot little harness-room stove. Little Falls went back to family life. As Freeman showed no signs of departure, he became part of that family life, and in an incredibly brief time had fallen into his own niche.

Freeman's superlative good looks, his aristocratically bored manner, his hinted superiorities of culture, his capabilities for inscrutable silences, his popularity with the girls, his personal interest in such things as picking out women's hats or curtain hangings, did not favour him in masculine eyes. These qualities had had a stunning effect at first; and if their owner had gone away as soon as he had ceased being a guest, it would have been all right. But when he overstayed; and became, even temporarily, one of them, the other men's self-esteem perforce began to build a defensive wall behind which to rehabilitate itself in its own eyes. Freeman dressed too well; he was a "dude"; he was a "fusser"; he might even be a "sissy." He was in danger of being considered only a little less negligible than a clergyman; and for essentially the same reason—that he never met men as men met each other. But he possessed one point of real contact, and that saved him.

Two years before, golf had come to Little Falls. It was at first a brand-new and ridiculous thing, meant for the old and feeble. No he-man would spend a valuable afternoon chasing that little white pill over a cow pasture. The few enthusiasts endured loud and raucous laughter and had to listen to the ancient jokes and definitions. But the game made its way by the well-known methods. Enthusiast persuaded scoffer to take just one whack. If scoffer got off a screamer he was lost through pride; if he flubbed he was lost through determination. Soon he came out with the weird clothes then considered indispensable—I believe the red jacket was to make one conspicuous to those behind. He pronounced his game *gowf*, and began to collect his clubs by the dozen. Soon the Country Club acquired a hundred acres and lost in this vastness a rudimentary nine holes. But nobody in Little Falls had done it in less than fifty.

Freeman could play golf, and what is more important, knew how he played golf. He arrived just at the time the young athletic men were taking it seriously, not to say frantically. He could do something well they could hardly do at all. His skill saved him, gave him his point of contact. His place in the community was not to be that of the "sissy" or even the "dude." He

was just "different," a "Harvard man." There happened to be no other graduates of that institution in Little Falls, so he became the type. It was the fiction that all "Harvard men" were like Freeman. The younger men never did get over feeling slightly self-conscious when he was about; but he had his place.

Fred could not get quite used to him. As long as Minnie was about it was all right. Then Fred could sit off one side, as it were, and throw in his remarks, if he had any, or sit quiet if he hadn't. The latter was usually the case. Fred was frankly not of the same breed of intellectual cat. The conversation was almost always on topics he was pretty hazy about, if indeed he had even heard of them at all; such as neo-Platonism, or pre-Raphaelite. He was vastly astonished at Minnie's glibness: she showed him, her husband, for the first time, an utterly unsuspected side.

Freeman was then at his crushing best. He became languidly and drawlingly dogmatic, sitting back with his eyes half-closed, cigarette smoke curling from his lips. Parenthetically, Fred had always quite simply considered cigarettes the mark of a "dude." Freeman was fond of proclaiming, with an air of high principle, that he never read any books later than those of the seventeenth century; except some few in French. This was a highly effective reply when any one asked him if he had read "*Robert Elsmere*," or "*She*," or some other of the popular works of the day. He said things written since the seventeenth century—the moderns, he called them—were without exception not worth reading. Fred wondered humbly how he could know if he never read any of them; but he supposed there must be a catch in it somewhere, so he kept quiet. To his surprise many of the young people could talk this stuff fluently. It rather shook, but did not upset, Fred's private opinion that Freeman was a little on the useless and ornamental side. Still he had puzzling superiorities that some people seemed to value.

It was the occasional unavoidable tête-à-tête that Fred dreaded. He felt called upon as a host to "entertain" Freeman, and he could not think of a single thing to say. Fred's conventions, as we have said, were few, but strong and simple. To be a good host was one of them. The two men had not one thing in common—not even golf, for Fred was still a robust scoffer. Minnie was their only bond. Freeman seemed to be able to bear up quite easily with any amount of silence; but Fred squirmed. He

became either deadly stilled, or indulgent in a type of facetiousness that rasped Freeman's nerves. On the whole, Fred would be relieved when Freeman's visit should come to an end. It was quite characteristic that he should also be ashamed of himself that he was relieved. Freeman was Minnie's brother!

II

It was also characteristic of Fred that, though secretly he desired nothing more than a resumption of his old home life, the moment he learned from Minnie that Freeman might be induced to remain permanently in Little Falls, that moment he began to use his utmost endeavours to have him do so. It is what Westerners call the "booster spirit." We all have it in greater or lesser degree. The instant we realize that Smith, Brown, or Robinson is thinking of moving to our neighbourhood, we commence to urge, argue, and arrange. Possibly if we stopped for one clear look at the situation, we would discover that the thing is essentially unimportant.

For the first time Fred became really eloquent with Freeman in pointing out the local advantages and opportunities for a young man. Freeman proved to be willing, in a negative sort of way. Minnie had suggested the idea: Fred had seconded it. Freeman's assent was based on inertia. Here was a place before his eyes, with a job to be had among people he knew. Of course a place like Little Falls was not a field entirely worthy of his talents; but it would do. The field worthy of his talents was filled with strangers of combative disposition; and among them Freeman would have to hunt for his opportunity. Freeman hated both uncertainty and undue exertion. He conceded that he might stay in Little Falls, if he could find something to do.

So Fred procured him a job. He was too sensible to offer the young man a position in his own business. In such matters Fred was no fool; and had no intention of involving himself in meshes of nepotism. But there was always the trying-out ground of the bank. There a man could do as much or as little, almost, as he pleased; could rise on opportunity or shelter beneath the comfort of routine according to his disposition. And it was, of course, excellent training in the fundamentals of business. Freeman took his place behind the cages. His duties began, it is to be presumed, with the tabulating of cancelled checks; but his dark and aristocratic good looks and exquisite clothes showed just as

effectively as though he had been the cashier. Indeed, his appearance alone was a real asset, and to be known as a Banker is more soothing than to be known as an Errand Boy, even though the jobs are the same.

He continued to live with his sister and brother-in-law. Now that at last one small side of him had become commercial and therefore understandable, Fred was more at ease with him.

CHAPTER VI

I

DURING the fervid two weeks of social agitation Cousin Jim dropped off the map completely. Whether he had taken Minnie's educational efforts to heart, or whether the ducks had lured him afield no one knew.

Late one Saturday afternoon, however, after the tumult and the shouting had died, he suddenly appeared at the Country Club.

There, after an exhilarating debate, he ran across Freeman and Mattie Walker about to take the street car. As an alternative he suggested that they walk the two miles home. To Freeman, who loathed all walking unless with a definite and desirable object like golf, this seemed a peculiarly unfortunate proposal; but Mattie seconded the idea enthusiastically, so he had to assent. Mattie's presence forced him into another situation not at all to his liking. She and Cousin Jim chattered away like high school kids. Freeman, plodding along rather glumly, really did not try to follow them. Only once did he break in, and then he got himself into trouble.

Mattie had said something which seemed to give him one of the openings he loved for the expression of his drawling, superior cynicism.

"It really isn't worth while," said he. "Life at its best is vulgar and trivial. We merely clothe it in the aristocratic graces in a futile attempt to disguise its ugliness."

This was the sort of thing, delivered as he alone knew how, that customarily got its effect almost automatically. Nobody ever attempted to dispute him for fear that would indicate they knew nothing about life and had been fooled by a gold brick. So generally they looked wise and sadly knowing, and nodded disillusioned corroboration. To Freeman's surprise Cousin Jim had stopped short and was staring at him in the bright moonlight with what seemed to be disapprobation.

"Everybody," said Cousin Jim deliberately, "is entitled to think

it as he pleases, but for my part I'd hate to jaundice myself pretending to believe such stuff! It may seem uncouth to you, but I'll admit I'm vulgarly enthusiastic about life, and I think there are a doggone lot more big things in it than you may have happened to notice!"

"Hear! Hear!" cried Mattie, who had no objection to shooting a sticker or so into this complacent young man, provided she could do so from as good cover as Cousin Jim. Freeman flushed. He desired to uphold no earnest conviction on the subject: he had merely trotted forth one of his sure fires to amuse the lady withal, and somehow the powder of the sure fire had proved damp.

"Look here," Cousin Jim went on more gently, "you need to get out. Why don't you come shooting with me next week and let me introduce you to a few aristocratic ducks?"

Freeman had no desire to go anywhere with Cousin Jim, let alone duck shooting. But before he could frame a reply, Mattie spoke up.

"Why, Cousin Jim," she objected, "of course Mr. Farnum doesn't shoot. He wouldn't like it out on your old marsh!"

That settled it. Freeman said he would be very glad to go.

II

They ran down to the Club House the following Saturday afternoon; the local stopping for a brief moment to drop them by the edge of a river without a building in sight. Cousin Jim unlocked a padlocked boat, and they rowed down stream two miles to a small shanty perched on the bank above high water. It was gray dark when they arrived, and an edged wind was searching deliberately across the marshes seeking whom it might shiver. A faint lucent streak in the west was reflected here and there on little pools among the marsh grasses and cat-tails. All the world was flat, except for three cold and naked trees against the sky.

Cousin Jim unlocked the shanty, fumbled about and produced a light.

"Here we are!" he cried cheerfully, "snug as a bug in a rug!" He clattered open a small iron stove and began to fuss with kindlings.

Freeman looked about him with distaste. He had been kicking himself ever since his rash acceptance. The affair had not one redeeming feature: he doubted whether he had even made the

desired impression on Mattie. It was cold, it looked dirty, there were no feline comforts whatever; and Freeman could see no point in going out on that exposed bleak marsh for the sake of shooting at a few silly ducks! However, he was in for it, and he had to go through with it. He had no thought, however, of making the best of it. He much preferred to look upon himself as an injured martyr deprived of the essential comforts for inadequate reasons. The indulgence of this point of view manifested itself externally in silence. But as Freeman had never been what you would call chatty with Cousin Jim, nobody but an expert would have detected anything unusual.

Cousin Jim apparently was no expert. He seemed full of spirits and anticipation, and chattered away about directions of the wind and northern flights and different "holes" very cheerfully as he fussed about the iron stove. In a short time he announced supper; and Freeman discovered he was supposed to consider ham and eggs and thick slices of bread and butter and a cup of strong coffee an adequate meal! Cousin Jim had cooked a dozen eggs and seemed mildly solicitous that Freeman did not eat his six.

"You'll need to stoke up," he urged. "It's going to be colder than Billy-be-damned in the morning. I really ought to have brought some pie," he added.

After supper Cousin Jim occupied the time very happily—for himself—in getting out and stowing in a boat innumerable wooden ducks, and examining the strings and weights attached to them; in arranging shotgun shells in a tin box; in rummaging out from untidy corners various brush knives, shell extractors, paddles, punt poles, and the like. Concerning each of these items he discoursed at length and cheerfully. Finally, he dug up some disreputable old canvas coats and rubber boots. Cousin Jim was supplying the whole outfit, necessarily, including the guns.

"There!" he announced at last, turning a beaming face to his unresponsive guest, "All set! Now we'd better turn in."

Freeman stepped outside. The marsh was flat and black now; the wind searched through his thin clothing, through his shrinking flesh to his very bones. He came back shivering.

"Wind's north," remarked Cousin Jim, "it's liable to turn cold by morning. That'll bring 'em in!"

The final affront of the occasion was when Freeman found that he was to sleep between blankets without sheets. He had never

done such a thing in his life: furthermore, he had never heard of such a thing. He doubted if it could be done. Every fastidious instinct shrank from the harsh contact. He reflected resentfully that he would not be able to sleep a wink. He hated the whole silly business. He began almost to hate Cousin Jim; he was so exuberantly cheerful.

III

He was quite sure he hated Cousin Jim when the latter haled him forth the following morning. Nobody had ever before in the world's history been up at such an hour—unless he had stayed up all night. The north wind seemed to have fulfilled its promise. It was cold—or worse. Freeman had revised his hatred of the sheetless blankets: they had become friends. How he dreaded leaving this warm nest! Why you could see your breath! What an ass he had been to leave his comfortable quarters at home to undertake this crazy expedition. Sport!

Ham and eggs and thick bread and butter and coffee for breakfast. Freeman, unaccustomed to eating at this hour, could hardly choke any of it down. Cousin Jim made sandwiches, also of thick bread and butter and ham and eggs, and wrapped them in newspapers. He had not much to say but he was busy and cheerful and whistled. Freeman hated anybody to be cheerful so early in the morning.

They put on thick garments and stepped out into the darkness. Lord, it was cold! The sweaters and canvas coats turned the wind, but the keen air nipped Freeman's ears and fingers, and made the inside of his nose feel positively raw. He took his place in the boat and humped over in a dumb sort of endurance. Cousin Jim, quite superfluously, warned him not to talk. He had no desire to talk. If he had anything at all to say it was to curse himself for getting into this uncomfortable fix.

Cousin Jim paddled for a time; then turned sharp to the right. After a moment he laid aside the paddle and took up a long pole with which he began to push strongly. Freeman could see nothing. He wondered how Cousin Jim knew when to turn, and by what knowledge or instinct he had so accurately hit the narrow channel through which they were now making their way.

This wonder was the first break in his self-absorption. The next was also a wonder; as to the fact that he was standing it

after all. It was too early for any sane man to be up, it was bitterly cold, his position in the cranky duck boat was cramped and one of his feet had gone to sleep: but it had not yet proved fatal. A very faint pride stirred within him. These Arctic fellows became understandable. Probably no one in the world's history had ever been so cold and miserable. But as long as he was in for it and had to go through with it—and he was going through with it—he found it commendable that he was doing so well. He was glad now he had inhibited a vigorous wail the general awfulness of the situation had tempted him to utter.

Freeman had firmly made up his mind that he was going to endure the experience; but never again! The entire day was going to be devoted to endurance. Nevertheless, here was one thing that had broken in to share his consciousness. Soon came another.

In the east a faint light had been slowly growing. It had not seemed to affect the darkness, yet in some manner indeterminate gray objects grew into visibility. The reed-grown banks of the channel through which they were poling began to be dimly perceptible: there was a glint on the water of tiny ponds to right and left: an horizon was defined. This half-light increased. The ponds and waterways became almost plain. One found himself in a world of multiplying details. And from all about came splashings, quackings, the roar of rising wings, the overhead whistle of departing wings. It seemed incredible that one could not see their owners, they were so loud and so near, and the light was by contrast with the draining night so strong. Freeman, in spite of his determination to be miserable, felt the stirrings of a faint excitement.

The boat turned into a pond. Cousin Jim dropped overboard one by one his wooden ducks, then pushed the craft into the reeds. He busied himself with the latter for a moment; upturned a box to sit on.

"Load your gun," he instructed Freeman in a low voice. "We're just about in time."

There ensued a period of waiting while the light grew. In that period Freeman's miseries returned on him. His watch told him it was six o'clock: his body told him it was even colder than he had thought; his anticipation showed him an interminable vista of minutes to be passed one by one. He was entirely encased within his own shell.

Something sudden dragged him out. He had a startling impression of the whistling rush of something swift in the air, of a bulk rising, of two shattering impacts. The fact was a flock of ducks had come in to the decoys; Cousin Jim had got to his feet; and had shot twice. Now as he was opening the breech of his gun he spoke in his ordinary voice.

"Why didn't you shoot?" he was asking.

Freeman could not very well tell the whole truth and say he had not shot because he had been suffering so cruelly. So he muttered a half-truth about not having seen them. But the incident caused him again to look outside himself.

He saw that the daylight had flooded the world: that the marsh stretched away interminably brown; that the sky was gray streaked with slate: that the little pond was ruffled by skurrying cats-paws and that the wooden ducks were bobbing solemnly at the ends of their lines. Then Cousin Jim produced a queer instrument of wood and nickel, a little bigger than a cigar, and began to talk duck on it. Freeman could see nothing, but from somewhere came a whistle of wings, which died away. After a moment Cousin Jim stopped talking duck and turned his face to Freeman.

"Mallards," he said. "They're wise old birds. You must have moved your head when they were circling right above us. You've got to hold absolutely rigid until they turn in over the decoys."

He spoke kindly and cheerfully; but Freeman felt a touch of reproach. Shortly Cousin Jim resumed talking duck. Freeman stared at the decoys through the interstices of the reeds. Suddenly from nowhere another flock materialized. They were low above the marsh, headed straight for the blind, their wings set. The direction of flight was so squarely toward the shooters that Freeman perceived with satisfaction that no calculation would be required for the shot: he could just hold right at them, like shooting at a paper on a fence. He had handled a shotgun a very little, but he was not a hunter.

"Let 'em have it!" muttered Cousin Jim.

Freeman arose to his feet, prepared to pulverize the two leaders. The instant the two men showed, the entire flight translated the momentum of their horizontal approach into a climb straight up. It is what an aeroplane does when it *zooms*. In addition every duck added his own duck power to the effort. They "towered,"

as sportsmen have it; and until you have seen it you can never imagine how fast and how far a duck can tower while you are winking an eye. Instead of being able to shoot as he would at stationary targets, Freeman was flustered by wildly scattering and escaping elusiveness. He banged away lustily, and of course missed both barrels.

"Get any?" queried Cousin Jim, blowing the black powder smoke from his gun.

"No: missed," replied Freeman shortly. He had heard two lovely splashes from Cousin Jim's side of the flock.

"Too bad: better luck next time," said the latter.

Now, as has been said, Freeman was no sort of a shot: he had never had the practice to become so. But no youth ever likes to admit himself a duffer at anything. Freeman began to glow with a dull and resentful anger at the situation; and with the anger began to grow a determination. He would show them!

However, three more flocks came in, and Freeman showed nobody anything. Twice he missed, and once he forgot to cock his gun! Those were the days before hammerless pieces, of course. He tugged away at the trigger until he felt black in the face. It was very mortifying to a sensitive soul. Cousin Jim seemed to make nothing of these catastrophes; killed his ducks with cheerful regularity; and seemed to be having a good time. Freeman became actually bitter. The whole thing was too silly for words.

A fourth flock came in. And *four* splashes followed the roar of the guns. Freeman had killed a pair!

"Good shot," commented Cousin Jim. "Landed them nicely."

Something happened inside Freeman; something analogous to hot sun on a misty meadow, or a wind on a fog-bound sea. He had killed two ducks: and he thought he knew just how he had killed them. You threw your aim at the body, and then swung your muzzle up and pulled trigger just as the head disappeared from view. He discovered in himself an intense eagerness for the next lot to come in, so he could try again. The blood was singing through his body. No longer did he feel cold or disgruntled. Also he wanted to be chatty; which shows that those two ducks had stirred Freeman up considerably. Minnie would not have known her darling brother had she been able at that moment to see his inner self accurately depicted in outward semblance. The latter manifestation would have been that of a

blithe and skiptious person who would have worn his hat on one side of his head.

More ducks came in from time to time, and Freeman had a chance to test his theories. It is only in romantic fiction that the hero wins the football match or licks the champion or cops off the million in Wall Street without knowing a thing about football, boxing, or finance. The idea was perfect; but ducks seemed to have no notion of regularity or standardization. They never acted the same way twice running. Still, out of a good many shots he did scratch down a few. One of the great compensations in life is the fact that the glow from a successful shot lasts a poor marksman longer than it does a good one. And a casual remark of Cousin Jim's supplied the one missing ingredient. After the fifth duck had fallen to Freeman's lavish burnt offering of black powder he said:

"Pity you haven't your own gun. There's nothing that throws a man off worse than shooting a strange gun, is there?" He seemed to speak as one expert to another.

Freeman's imagination, turned agile by the necessity of making this extraordinary slaughter quite theoretically perfect, seized upon the thought. Of course: couldn't expect him to do himself justice with a strange gun! In fact, considering that he was shooting a strange gun, he was doing rather remarkably well! It is to be doubted if there were many other duck shots, shooting a strange gun, who could equal this! The aforementioned imagination merely neglected as unimportant the fact that any gun whatever would be strange to Freeman.

The flight slackened. There were long intervals when there were no birds in the sky. Cousin Jim remarked that it was too dinged warm for the best shooting. Two hours before Freeman would probably have meditated killing Cousin Jim for making that remark.

"Yes," he said now, wisely, "and it looked last night as though that north wind would bring a cold snap."

"Well, we'll smoke and keep our weather eye open; and there'll be the afternoon flight, anyway," was Cousin Jim's decision. "It's sort of pretty out here on the marsh, anyway."

They sat and smoked and ate relishingly the sandwiches made of thick bread and butter and ham and eggs. Freeman assented to the proposition that grub certainly tasted good out here. No one would have known Freeman. In the contagion of Cousin

Jim's extreme youth he had become quite a boy about it all. He followed up Cousin Jim's remark about the marsh being pretty by discovering all sorts of compositions in the landscape. He pointed them out. This was a new one on Cousin Jim. Freeman became absorbed in making him see the various little pictures that could be composed by isolating certain bits from the whole. The isolating had to be done with an eye for the distribution of masses. Cousin Jim was vastly interested and could not get over his astonishment.

"I've been coming down to this marsh off and on for near twenty-five years," said he, "and I've always thought it was pretty—it is sort of wide and wild and lonesome—but I never thought it had so many little pictures in it!"

"And colour," supplemented Freeman. He somehow was as pleased as punch over having impressed Cousin Jim, whose opinion yesterday had been negligible. "What's its colour?"

"Why, brown."

"Turn your head upside down and look."

Cousin Jim gravely inverted.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" he cried.

"All kinds of colours, aren't there? Lilac, and purple, and pearl, and pink—all sorts."

"It's like magic," said Cousin Jim. "How do you explain that?"

"Oh, it's just that when you look at it upside down you eliminate the form of things and see only the colour. Your attention is not divided."

Swish!—swish! A flock of swift teal had darted down and flashed away again. Cousin Jim laughed.

"We better get on the job," said he.

They stayed out until the early dusk, returning only just in time to catch the local train back. In the smoking car Freeman was no longer silent. In fact, he talked a blue streak; and his conversation was of the shots he had made and why, and the shots he had not made and why not. Of course a fellow shooting a strange gun——

IV

Freeman had promised Cousin Jim, and himself, that he would go duck hunting again—and had meant it. This was in the first glow, but the first glow died. The discomforts gradually came

to be uppermost in his mind. He began to look back on the excellence of his endurance with a little wonder and considerable pride. But he shrank from its repetition. There was no doubt that he had enjoyed the experience, but unless fairly forced into it by circumstances he would never voluntarily pay so much in feline comfort for that kind of enjoyment. The unaccustomed struggle made it not worth while. He had always overindulged his body, and now he could not fight it. Never did he abandon the fiction that he wanted to go duck hunting again, but was prevented by untoward circumstances from accepting the invitations; and always he clung tenaciously to the prideful pose of one who hunted ducks on incredibly cold mornings and made nothing of it. But he did not go again.

Cousin Jim was sorry for this. Whenever Freeman's name came up for discussion Cousin Jim thenceforward took pains to say that he was not so bad after all, if he would only give himself a chance. Even when the occasion was in the nature of a praise meeting for Freeman, Cousin Jim made this remark; which Freeman's friends resented as uncalled for. Nevertheless, somehow, Cousin Jim seemed to consider Freeman's mere existence required some sort of defense or explanation, and he was always glad to offer it.

CHAPTER VII

I

THE bleak indoor winter passed and spring came. There was slush underfoot and blue overhead, and the faint burgeoning of new leaves atop the trees, and the cries of wildfowl at night. Everywhere, in city and country, was the quick joyous sound of running waters. The ground's surface turned soft and receptive to the quickening season. On front lawns the close-knit sod was squashy underfoot. Flute-voiced blackbirds, triumphant-voiced robins, liquid-voiced bluebirds called to springing life and were answered. At first dawn the chipping sparrow uttered his long trill of summons, and almost at once the world was flooded with the high sustained harmony of the birds—a chorus that, for its brief hour, so filled every nook and cranny of the morning that there seemed room for nothing else.

It was a season of restlessness and anticipation to most people. Children sailed little boats down the rushing torrents of the gutters, or built dams across them; grown-ups overhauled fishing tackle, or slopped around their gardens, or began to talk of new projects or desires. Ezra could be seen alongside the barn, chair tilted in the sun, the round iron stove cooled at last, basking and smoking his pipe. There was everywhere anxious discussion as to whether the furnace should be allowed to go out. Some of the oldest generation were distressed that their advice as to sarsaparilla was ignored by the younger. The little wooden vestibules known as "storm doors" were being dismantled from the porches.

Cousin Jim emerged from his gable den and began to go on his restless tramps through the country. His long legs covered a great number of miles every afternoon, across fields, through woods, along the thicket borders of lakes or the reed borders of marshes, making no account of road, of mud, of lingering wet snowdrift. All the face of the world was drenched. The ground was so soft that often his feet sank to the ankles; little

runnels of water trickled down the slopes in the most unexpected places; wide temporary pools showed the springing grasses in their shallows and the blue sky from their surfaces in strange blended combination. The wind was clean as the brilliant air, and the vibrantly liquid songs and calls of such as the meadow lark or the red-winged blackbird seemed specifically to express that quality, as well as the red of willow thickets or the smell of wet bursting growth.

These things, and many more, Cousin Jim noticed with the surface of his mind and recognized by name. He was something of a naturalist in that respect, though he was not what one would call a prying naturalist. But he did not pause over the observation of individual things. The panorama of external nature passed before his consciousness, his mind in almost complete abeyance. He was open to and lost in the suspended and brooding spirit. He was absorbent, taking sustenance in some mysterious fashion he could not himself have explained, except that somehow it had to do with his "job" of getting caught up with himself. If, as occasionally happened, someone asked him why on earth he wanted to go slopping around in the wet and slush, he generally answered either that he was "out instincting," or was "out listening," and would laugh at the other's bewilderment and refuse to explain. As a matter of fact, Cousin Jim would have had difficulty in explaining. He had not yet clearly defined to himself what he was about or what it meant. He just liked to tramp about in the spring and enjoy things. Always his quick eye noted the beauties and the curiosities of the little details; but more fundamentally his instincts were absorbing and feeding and growing. In this phase of Cousin Jim you might have described him either as a mystic, or a harmless "nature-lover," or just a plain nut, depending on how you had been brought up.

But he always returned from these expeditions not only wet and muddy, but with the odd twinkle in his eye greatly augmented and refreshed.

II

To the Kirby family this spring was memorable. Minnie was to have a baby. The fact became perfectly evident to any one; but the strange etiquette of those days, not yet fully outgrown, was elaborately to ignore all such things, so that Minnie had mentioned the approaching event only to one or two even of her

own sex. One of the few was Camilla. This in itself was a tremendously radical, perhaps even a little guilty thing to do; for Camilla was unmarried and therefore, of course, supposed officially to be absolutely ignorant. However, Camilla's gushing outpour proved too much for such flimsy barriers.

They drove to take the air, though, as the windows of the coupé were tight shut, it would be difficult to see how they accomplished it. Camilla effervesced over the baby and the baby-clothes. Her awe-stricken and rather wailing sympathy with Minnie over the "ordeal" would not have won the approval of the modern school of psychotherapeutics.

"Aren't you *scared*?" she demanded breathlessly.

Minnie was a bit scared, but her vital mind insisted on the reasonable attitude.

"Well, people do have them," she pointed out. "It seems to be a pretty common occurrence."

"And, oh!" cried Camilla, rapturously, sailing off on a new tack, "think what it will be to have a little soul, a little unsullied unformed soul to mould!"

Here she touched upon conviction. Minnie was very positive on this point: the new Kirby was certainly not going to run wild, like those awful Brainerd children, for example. Children should never be handled, they should never be jounced, they should never be snuggled or dandled nor even talked to by a lot of people. Nay, more: the infant should never have these things done to it by its own mother: it should be made comfortable and be left absolutely alone by everybody until it had attained the Age of Apperception, whatever that was.

Camilla, who for the first time heard these modern theories, was a little awed and somewhat dashed. A certain "Aunt Camilla" idea receded into an indeterminate future.

"Don't you think a mother is going to miss an awful lot of pleasure in her baby?" she suggested.

"Pleasure!" cried Minnie, "of course! But shouldn't any true mother be willing to sacrifice her selfish pleasure for her child's good?" She warmed to her topic. Now that the wonder of this new estate had crowded into unimportance the details of serving familiar food strangely, all Minnie's eager spirit sought its outlet in the new direction. "The trouble with women is that they do not take such things seriously enough," she went on. "It is not clear thinking. They do the easiest, the pleasantest

thing without a thought for the ultimate effect. No wonder we have sickly children or stupid children! Think of the folly of swallowing whole all this absurd Mother Goose and silly fairy stories! It's just as easy to fill their little brains with good food as such trash. It's just a matter of proper selection."

For once Minnie was doing the talking, and all the demoralized but worshipful Camilla could say was that she thought Minnie simply wonderful!

"It's a tremendous responsibility, a sacred responsibility," continued Minnie, "and I should be a fool not to be giving all my thought to it. The first years are the plastic years, and their influence practically determines in many respects all the rest of the child's life. Few have any idea what an effect such things as the colour of the nursery walls or the beauty or ugliness of surrounding objects have on the child's taste, for example——"

III

This edifying and instructive conversation might have consumed all the air they intended that day to take, had it not been interrupted by a most astounding condition of affairs. They were passing the old Kirby place. For years it had presented the respectably well-kept but impersonal tight aloofness of that which is entrusted to a competent caretaker. To-day it was evident that something unusual was going on. The big iron gates were thrown back and wheel tracks defined themselves on the well-raked moist white surface of the driveway. Never within Minnie's experience at Little Falls had this happened before. The only ingress had been on foot through a narrow wicket which remained locked until by repeated ringing one might arouse reluctant old Tom. Peering beneath the new foliage of the trees Minnie caught a glimpse of shutters thrown back and windows opened. This was enough. She gave an order and at once the coupé, with its shining high-checked horses, its spotty dog, and its saturnine driver turned in.

The driveway swung and dipped on a wide curve to a hollow below the elevation on which the mansion stood. Here the more recent artificially planted maple trees gave way to a remnant of the ancient forest—red oaks, butternuts, and an occasional tall hickory. They had been well spaced by judicious cutting, so that the wide-open lawns beneath them spread clear and green. At

the bottom of the hill was a little pond. Minnie, her instincts casting forward beyond this Christmas time to many Christmases to come, thought what a wonderful place for children this would be, with its slopes for coasting in the winter; its pond for skating or for paddling, or the sailing of boats in the summer; and the dry rattling down of its butternuts and hickory nuts in season.

The coupé drew up at the wide terrace. A truck stood backed up to the door, and men were carrying boxes into the dark interior. Upstairs all the blinds had been thrown back; the windows stood open wide. A dark, quick little foreign-looking man had taken his station beneath the portico whence he directed the movements of the men carrying in the boxes. Over by the hedges old Tom was clipping away, looking somehow disgruntled. Minnie caught his eye and signalled him. To her surprise he answered the signal promptly. By this Minnie knew that a cataclysm must have happened in old Tom's life; for old Tom was a natural obstructionist. Normally, he would not have seen her signal for some time; then, having seen it, he would have delayed understanding it; when at last it had been understood, he would have had to lay aside his shears, pick up a dozen clippings one by one, turn the sprinkling water down a trifle, before at last he ambled over to where Minnie, exasperated almost beyond endurance, awaited him. To-day Tom came to her at once, his shears still in his hand.

"What's going on, Tom?" she demanded.

"You may well ask, ma'am," grumbled Tom, "you may well ask. For fifteen years now I've kept this place, and never goings on like this before. This little dark furriner comes in yesterday and takes charge without as much as by-your-leave. He brings a lot of men in on my smooth driveway, and tears up my stair coverings, and——"

"But, Tom," interrupted Minnie, "who is he? Surely he has a right here, or he wouldn't be here now."

"Oh, he had some sort of a letter, and they sent up young Mr. Price from the bank," acknowledged Tom. "I couldn't gain-say them."

Minnie's eyes were alight and spots of red showed in her cheeks. This was exciting. Something was happening in the old Kirby mansion at last; the old great-uncle must be emerging from the mists of legend at least far enough to issue orders.

"Is Mr. Kirby going to let or sell the place?" asked Minnie.

"I am not in the confidence of the young man yonder," replied Tom sulkily.

Minnie considered. This was too thrilling. She must go to headquarters, but she had no intention of placing herself in a false position. "I think I would like to speak to that young man," she told Tom.

"Ay," he assented, quite unmoved.

"Well, go fetch him for me!" cried Minnie, impatient at last.

Tom moved deliberately. She saw him speak to the stranger and jerk his thumb over his shoulder in her direction. The young man immediately darted down the steps and across the white terrace. She found herself the recipient of a low bow and the object of a close scrutiny from a pair of brilliant black eyes.

"Madame would speak to me?" he asked, with just a trace of accent.

"I am Mrs. Frederick Kirby," Minnie explained, and paused.

"I act at present as the courier of Monsieur Kirby," the young man supplied.

"I merely wanted to say," went on Minnie, "that any information I may be able to give you is at your disposal in case you need assistance."

The young man bowed again.

"Thanks, madame, I have found excellent the facilities. One thing only I lack, and it may be that Madame could direct me."

"Yes?" responded Minnie graciously but loftily. Her busy brain was seeking some clue to the situation. What status has a courier? Was he in the category of servant merely, or was he a subordinate like a private secretary? Minnie was gingerly desirous of assuming the proper attitude toward this keen-eyed clever-looking young man; but even more she was desperately anxious, as a Kirby, not to reveal her absolute ignorance of these Kirby goings on in her own city beneath her own nose.

"I have," explained the stranger, "difficulty in obtaining under servants." He threw out his hands with an expressive gesture. "The kitchen maids, the upstairs maids. Monsieur of course brings his own men, that is understood," he threw in parenthetically, "but of trained maidservants there is lack. And the wages demanded!"

Minnie's front-line defence wavered beneath the shock, but her main position held in spite of the slight upheaval of the shoulders that marked Ezra's complete rout.

"I see your difficulty," she hastened, for Ezra was quite capable of volunteering an opinion on the situation. "This is of course a small city. You may have to bring people in from New York." At least she had gained one bit of information. "Has Monsieur Kirby decided on the exact date of his arrival? My last information was indefinite," she equivocated.

"It is still indefinite, madame. Monsieur Kirby delays until I can report all things prepared; and until the horses of Monsieur have arrived. There has been difficulty in the transportation of them over the sea."

Minnie was burning with a thousand curiosities; but some inexplicable, subtle, and powerful necessity forbade her taking further risks with this young man. What would he think if he knew that she was not only blankly astonished at this sudden reappearance, but that actually she was ignorant of the whereabouts, the circumstances, the history, even the appearance of one of the two only relatives her husband possessed? She made some further remark and ordered Ezra to drive on. The Frenchman looked after her a moment, then returned to the portico. Minnie might have saved herself trouble. He knew the whole situation perfectly.

IV

They drove out again into the street. Camilla was wildly excited and could not understand why Minnie seemed less so.

"My dear," said the latter, "of course, I am interested. But I can't be too thrilled. It will just be another elderly relative; and I have no illusions about relatives. He's sure to be some sort of a nuisance."

"You are so clever, Minnie," said Camilla, somewhat dashed by this commonsense view. "He must be fairly well off. What do you suppose he is like?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. No one has. My only hope is that he will prove fairly presentable, though you know yourself what these old pioneers are. Look at Cousin Jim."

"But Cousin Jim is different," said Camilla, doubtfully.

"Now, Camilla"—Minnie faced her fairly—"I know perfectly well what you mean about Cousin Jim, though I doubt if you know yourself. I am quite just about him. He's a darling in a good many ways when you can get him by himself, and at times he's a great comfort to talk to; but now, really, would you ever ask him for any *sensible* advice, or expect to get it from him?"

"No: I suppose not," acknowledged Camilla, "but——"

"And he's perfectly all right with our home people who thoroughly understand him; but really, you'd hardly consider him in general what I meant when I said 'presentable,' now would you?"

"No, I suppose not," repeated Camilla.

"Well, then; what is it?" demanded Minnie.

"I don't know," confessed Camilla, "I agree with all you say, of course, but there's something about him. I feel like cold boiled greens compared with heart of lettuce when he's around."

Minnie laughed.

"It isn't clear thinking, dear," she said kindly. "You're romantic. Now why should I get thrilled over this Uncle—what is his name—it's something wildly absurd, like a joke in *Puck*—Oh, yes, Ezekiel! He seems at least to have a servant with grand ideas, but he's sure to be crabbed and cranky. And Fred is always so conscientious in family matters!"

"You are so analytical and clever, Minnie," said the crushed Camilla.

"I simply use my commonsense."

"Perhaps he may be better than you think."

"I'm sure I hope so," said Minnie indifferently. "Let's make him an East Indian mogul dripping pearls."

v

Time dulled the first curiosity. Uncle Ezekiel delayed his coming beyond all reason. Fred did his best to find out something definite but failed. The courier proved to be past master in baffling evasions. Fred did his duty as he saw it and dropped the matter. He was busy. When the time came he would fulfil his obligation in the premises. Minnie's natural curiosity in matters to do with houses would have interested her in what was going on; but she did not feel like placing herself in a false position. More important affairs crowded the little sensation into the background.

About six weeks later Minnie, driving downtown with Camilla, noticed a small compact crowd filling the sidewalk and overflowing part way into the street. It was a quiet, expectant crowd, and in Little Falls could mean only a patent medicine vendor or some other faker. Minnie was annoyed because she wanted to get into the bank. But when Ezra had managed to edge his way

through the fringes they found the occasion much more astounding than any ordinary feathered herb doctor.

A vehicle like a small victoria was drawn up next the curb. It was of Brewster blue, with dark blue upholstery. To it were attached a haughty pair of horses whose tails had been docked. On its box sat two men rigidly at attention. They were dressed, from north to south, in bell-crowned top-hats with cockades, blue coats to match the upholstery but faced with yellow, skin-tight white buckskin breeches, and patent leather boots with yellow roll-over tops. One man held his arms folded across his chest: the other poised lightly the reins in one gloved hand and a whip at a forty-five-degree angle in the other. Except that the carriage had four wheels, the horses four legs, and the men a pair of eyes and a few such appurtenances apiece, nothing like this had ever been seen on the streets of Little Falls. Hence the crowd. Opinion in the latter was divided, one faction maintaining this was an advance effervescence of a circus, and the other logically pointing out that it was too early in the season for circuses, but just right for "Spring medicine." The argument was just audible, but gained no flicker from the automatons on the box.

Ezra, distracted by the necessity of expanding an aura of savage contempt, had difficulty in getting to the curb. Just as he did so, the owner of the equipage came out of the bank.

The crowd felt itself rewarded for its gathering. If the turnout was intriguingly exotic, this slender old man was incredible. He had a keen, thin, dead-white countenance from which looked alert and snapping black eyes; and he carried his head a little in advance as though listening. So far his attributes were human, as Little Falls understood it; like the carriage having four wheels. But his white moustache was waxed and twisted to fine needle-like points that stuck out horizontally a good two inches; beneath his lip had been permitted a little square tuft of bristly white hair; in one eye was mounted a monocle attached to his buttonhole by a broad black ribbon. He wore a cut-away coat, a light slate-gray waistcoat, edged with a starched white false waistcoat, striped gray trousers, buttoned shoes, and white gaiters or "spats." His tie was a marvellous Ascot puff in which nestled a single large pearl. He carried a cane in his gloved hand.

Such a figure has its normal place in the world where it will pass unremarked. You and I, dear reader, have seen it in its native haunts near the Jockey Club in Paris, or in Piccadilly, or

even hovering about some New York club. Or possibly on the stage. Even now, forty years after the time of these happenings, such an appearance in a town like Little Falls would occasion comment, perhaps ribald. But Little Falls of the late 'eighties simply did not believe there was any such animal. The evidence of its eyes left it unconvinced. It merely wondered what the old party was going to sell and when he was to begin, and it vouchsafed admiring appreciation of the get-up.

The man who had his arms folded descended "by the count," as the drill-sergeant has it, made two right-angled turns, and arrived with military precision at the carriage step just as the old man put his foot thereon. By some magic the footman now carried a lap robe neatly folded over his left arm. This he flipped open so cleverly that it fell across his master's knees at the precise moment that individual took his seat. Then the footman returned "by the count" to his elevated position, and again folded his arms. The crowd broke into a half-cheer: it knew a good turn when it saw it.

The old man stared back at them with a strange effect of impersonal aggression. It was as if he did not even see them as human beings; but at the same time drove them fiercely back. The coachman raised his hand slightly and the equipage rolled away at an extraordinarily rapid gait. This saved Ezra's life; though naturally he was not of apoplectic habit.

Camilla, still vaguely under the influence of the crowd's corn-doctor suggestion, laughed.

"I wonder who *he* is?" she cried.

But Minnie, whose instincts recognized the real thing, whatever kind of a thing it might be, was descending.

"I'm going to find out," she said firmly.

She was gone for some minutes, and when she returned she took her place in silence except for a command to Ezra. Camilla stood it as long as she could.

"Tell me, you mean thing!" she burst out.

Minnie turned to her solemnly.

"Camilla," she said, and there was awe in her tones, "it is! It positively is!"

"Is what?" cried Camilla, roused. "Was anybody *ever* so aggravating!"

"It's Uncle Zeke!"

CHAPTER VIII

I

FRED was inclined to be amused with all he had heard. The fame of the turn-out had already gone abroad, and he had been considerably "joshed" at the club. He agreed readily enough with Minnie that they should call promptly. That procedure tallied perfectly with his sense of family duty. Minnie felt that she would blow up into small pieces if her now incandescent curiosity were not immediately appeased. Freeman, excited for once in his life, had come home fully aroused. Uncle's get-up hit Freeman where he lived. Beside which, as he told Minnie in business confidence, Uncle had deposited One Hundred Thousand Dollars, as a *checking* account: and he, Freeman, had personally seen him stuffing a safe deposit vault with all colours of securities. Minnie decided that it was only proper that the family should welcome its new member without delay.

So promptly at eight the coupé rolled up the long driveway to the old Kirby mansion. They descended and mounted the steps. Before they had touched the bell the front door swung open. Fred grunted with surprise at this. It was almost as though they had been expected.

No one would have known the old house. Evidently the workmen had been even more radically busy than any one had dreamed. Gone was the narrow old front hall, and in its place was a high dim vestibule of dark panelling, with polished floor on which lay a huge soft rug, and a genuine refectory table bearing a wide bronze bowl. The man who had opened the door relieved Fred of his hat and led the way to a small reception room—which Minnie rapidly calculated would be a piece of the old library—took their cards, and disappeared.

The reception room, too, was strange. It was very simple, but utterly unlike anything Minnie had ever seen. She had no opportunity to analyze details, but saw that the note of its quiet

effect was struck by the long dark hangings, again the polished floor and rugs, and the small lightly formed chairs. A single gleaming marble statuette stood on a column in the window embrasure. She had time to notice only so much when the curtains at one side parted and Uncle Ezekiel stood for a moment against their background.

He was in full evening dress, and he carried the monocle poised in his hand; but screwed it into his eye at the instant of his appearance. His clothing blended with the hangings, so that the gleam of his linen and the white of his hair and skin showed in almost startling contrast.

For a briefly appreciable instant he paused, then moved toward them, and the monocle dropped to the end of its ribbon.

"This is indeed kind of you," he said. His voice was pleasant, and he spoke urbanely with a distinct enunciation, "I have anticipated this pleasure."

He still carried his head a little in advance, as though listening; and his eyes were wrinkled at the temples and the muscles of his cheeks half-lifted the corners of his mouth as though he smiled; but back of the perfect semblance of solicitous courtesy Minnie sensed at once a leisurely, watchful, perhaps tolerant cynicism. The keen black young eyes moved from one to the other, appraising, Minnie felt, every detail of dress, manner, and feature. She sensed the appraisal, and she flushed hotly with resentful chagrin that she had not made Fred put on his dress suit. In the flash before she replied to the greeting she had time to feel a little shabby, and to react in a flare of defiant refusal to be downed. When she did reply her voice was so exquisitely though artificially toned down and modulated that Fred glanced at her in puzzled surprise. Fred, too, had a reaction; he found that his anticipated attitude of tolerant amusement was not tenable.

"I am delighted," went on the old man, after the first formalities, "that you have found it convenient to come so early, for it gives me an opportunity—if you will be so informal—of making the acquaintance of my family at my own board. My dinner is no more than begun. Allow me to command for you places."

Minnie's panic-stricken doubt as to whether an evening call was the proper thing gave opportunity for Fred to make the answer.

"Bless you!" he cried heartily. "We had dinner long ago!" and somehow it seemed as though he were speaking very loudly.

"But don't let us keep you. I should think you'd be pretty hungry. Go ahead and finish up. We'll just wait."

Which knocked into a cocked hat Minnie's vague, half-formed idea of excusing what now appeared a completely ill-timed call. Uncle listened to Fred with the deepest attention, his head on one side. At the conclusion of the speech he waited perhaps three seconds before replying. Later Minnie found this to be a habit; but now, to her sensitiveness, he seemed to be weighing Fred's remarks.

"In that case," he observed, "I shall continue my repast; but I insist that you give me the pleasure of your company."

He drew aside the hangings. They entered the dining room. This, too, had been made over in dark wood effects. The sole illumination came from two many-branched silver candlesticks. It threw into relief the appointments of a small round table; and into dimness the half-guessed sideboard, and two large paintings on the walls. A man in evening dress, but with a black tie, stood at attention. Minnie recognized in him the "courier." Could waiting on table be part of a courier's duties? Without command the man placed two chairs, then asked a low-voiced question.

"Mr. and Mrs. Kirby have dined," replied their host. "They will do me the honour of a glass of wine with me."

He courteously drew out Minnie's chair for her.

Minnie had rallied. She rose to the occasion.

"We wanted you to know," said she, "that we are so glad you have decided to cease being a myth. You have been a myth to us, you know; much more of a myth than you can imagine."

By an effort she rose above the courteously listening attitude.

"Thank you, my dear," acknowledged Mr. Kirby, after the pause.

"I hope," continued Minnie, "you intend to stay long enough to know us and to let us know you at last."

He seemed to savour this a moment, without change of attitude, but with an alteration somehow in his piercing gaze. Minnie, whose remark had been merely a social stop-gap, flushed with the thought that he might be considering whether or not to gratify curiosity.

"I expect to make this my home, my *pied-à-terre*, at least," he said, apparently deciding. "For the greater part of the year I shall live here." He contemplated her keenly, and the fixed smile-wrinkles about his eyes deepened a trifle. "You are perhaps

asking yourself why." Minnie murmured a half-protest to which he paid no attention. "Frankly, I do not know. A homing instinct perhaps, a call of the blood. I do not know. I do not question these things: I come."

Minnie felt here something she would have liked to have played up to: but Fred's hearty tones shattered it.

"In that case," said he, and again his voice sounded brutally loud, "you will want to join the clubs. We have the Country Club, and the Iroquois Club here, and you certainly must join them."

Again the listening and appraising attitude.

"I hope to do so," replied Mr. Kirby, "and it is most courteous of you to suggest it. I have been given to understand that Mr. Pine has made arrangements.—Ah, here we are!"

The servant brought in very carefully a long narrow basket in which half-reclined a bottle. He laid before Minnie and Fred small neatly inscribed cards bearing the legend, *Château de Chalinat 1869*. The basket he offered to Mr. Kirby, who felt of the bottle and nodded his head.

"This," said Mr. Kirby, with an approach to real animation, "I am happy to be able to offer you on this occasion of our first meeting. It is a French wine, of necessity unknown to you because, to my knowledge, it is never by any chance allowed to get into commercial hands. It is made by friends of mine for their own cellars. They have for generations been noted as connoisseurs, but have been so good as to present me with some of it. The vintage of '69 is an exceptionally fortunate one, and I am sure you will agree with me that it is one of my greatest possessions. I reserve it."

"We feel more than honoured, sir," said Minnie. Fred was still submerged.

"It is not every day that an old man, my dear, has the opportunity of discovering himself possessed of so charming a family," deprecated Mr. Kirby. "The occasion is appropriate."

He arose and bowed, holding out his glass.

"A glass of wine with you, madame!" said he, "a glass of wine with you, sir!"

"Here's to you!" said Fred, and drank her down, down, down! Mr. Kirby passed the glass two or three times beneath his nose, took a tiny sip, savoured it for a moment before finally swallowing it. Minnie, too, took a sip. She knew nothing of rare old

wines, but her keenness saw that Fred had made a break; and she noticed that at an almost imperceptible sign the man laid the bottle away on the sideboard without refilling the glass.

"I find myself, as you can well imagine, greatly interested in the changes that have taken place," said Mr. Kirby, "I left here, as perhaps you know, when a small lad, and have not seen it since. While one would expect changes in the span of a man's lifetime, one would not expect changes such as I see. I left a country village: I find what appears to be a modern industrial town."

Here was something Fred could bite on. He plucked up spirit and began to tell Uncle Ezekiel of the commercial advantages and future of Little Falls. This was man's talk.

"Our chamber of commerce," he boasted, "is a bundle of live ones; we don't let a dead one stick, not even for a minute; and when it goes after a thing it gets it every time. Why, sir, only last year——" and he went on enthusiastically to tell in detail an instance of the abatement of exorbitant freight-car rates on frozen hogs. Fred at last felt sure ground under him. This was the sort of talk he was accustomed to.

Mr. Kirby listened to him with the most single attention behind his mask of politeness, his gaze never wavering from Fred's face. Minnie's imagination, oversensitized by the whole affair, was conscious of a genuine interest behind the mask; but whether it was in the subject matter of Fred's conversation or in Fred himself as a curious specimen she was unable to determine. As soon as she could she broke through on her own account.

"You must not make Uncle believe that business is *all* we think of!" she warned Fred archly. "Of course we are a long way out of the world, but we try to keep in touch."

The exclusive attention was at once transferred to her, but with the addition of the monocle, which now Mr. Kirby rescued from the end of its ribbon and clamped in his eye. Minnie, to her secret fury, suddenly felt apologetic, though why she could not have said.

"Of course," she continued brightly, "we miss the abundance of theatres and music that one gets in New York, but it will surprise you to see how many good things do manage to come our way."

"Ah, yes," agreed Mr. Kirby. "Doubtless. Though when one considers such things one naturally expects to go to Paris or London for them."

Minnie's patriotic spirit seized this opening to let off pressure that had accumulated from other causes.

"You do not consider that this country produces good things?" she challenged.

But Mr. Kirby's benevolent wrinkles merely deepened their grimace.

"Many things most admirable, my dear; most admirable." The monocle fell. "Shall we take coffee in the drawing room? I do not suggest our smoking," he said to Fred, "I am sure that you agree with me in preferring Madame's company."

The drawing room proved to be in pure French style, admirably done. Fred thought it looked dinky, and spindly, and cream-puffy; but that was just Fred. Minnie exclaimed.

"You have done wonderful things here. I should hardly know the dear old house."

"I should not have supposed you familiar with it. It has been closed for many years," commented Mr. Kirby, drily.

Minnie flushed with vexation. Was she exceptionally stupid to-night, or did this exquisite old man take a subtle delight in placing her in the wrong?

"I looked it over from time to time," she replied. "Fred asked me to—to see if Tom was being careful. Fred always has exaggerated ideas of family duty. I hope you don't mind."

"I am deeply grateful," and he made her a little bow.

"It has always had an old-fashioned charm to me."

"It was extremely ugly," stated Mr. Kirby, with more positiveness of conviction than he had shown heretofore.

"Of course," supplemented Minnie hastily, "it was a sentiment lingering from the past, I suppose."

After the coffee was drunk she rose to go.

"Thank you for coming to see me," said Mr. Kirby, "I hope soon to make the acquaintance also of your brother, madame. That will complete pleasantly my acquaintance with our family group."

"There's Cousin Jim," of course Fred had to say! "He's your third cousin's nephew, I believe, or something like that."

"I have already had the pleasure of meeting Mr. James Kirby," said Great-Uncle's precise and measured tones. "He did me the honour of calling this morning"—Mr. Kirby allowed an instant's pause, then added—"before breakfast."

The tone of voice did not differ, but Minnie thought there was

the faintest deepening of the lines of the mask, a slight amused narrowing of the eyes.

II

The manservant was at the door and let them into the coupé behind Ezra's disapproving back. The drive home was in silence. Fred attempted one or two comments, but receiving no response, finally lighted his belated cigar. Minnie was absorbed in making a number of assortments and adjustments. Twice only she emerged.

"I was ashamed of you the way you acted with that wine," she said.

"What? Why?" cried Fred, utterly astounded. "What did I do?"

"It was priceless, and you gulped it down as though it had been ginger ale. Didn't you see how Mr. Kirby sipped it?"

"Well," acknowledged Fred, unconvinced, "it was good booze, all right. I enjoyed it. But I supposed it was meant to drink."

She did not pursue the subject, but replunged into her meditations.

"It will have to be a home dinner," she said at last, "a very small one, with just a few people."

"What *are* you talking about?" demanded Fred.

"What we shall do for him, of course, to get him to meet people."

"Well, if you want him to meet people," Fred pointed out most reasonably, "you want to ask in a lot, not just a few. What did we build that ballroom for, anyway? Why not have a reception or maybe a card party or something you could get in the gang to?"

But Minnie looked at him pityingly.

"You don't understand," she told him.

III

At home they heard voices in the den that indicated Freeman and Camilla Stearns, and smelled a rank pipe that betrayed Cousin Jim. The light in the hall would have showed that Minnie was in a strong excitement. She threw off her wrap and darted to the door of the den. Camilla exclaimed with delight when she saw her.

"I just had to come over and hear," cried the gushing damsel.

"I knew you'd be calling there this evening, and I just couldn't bear it!"

Freeman looked his inquiry, but said nothing.

Minnie plunged at once into an excited and appreciative description. She was delighted to have someone to tell about it; someone with Freeman's understanding taste and Camilla's enthusiasm. Her conclusion was that the mysterious uncle was a personage, not only of great worldly knowledge and exquisite taste, but also indubitably of immense wealth.

"Only one who *knows* can appreciate how much money has gone into that place!" said Minnie.

The oriental mogul dripping with pearls idea was not so far off. And such a romantic figure! Think what a man of the world of this exquisite type is going to mean to Little Falls! sang Minnie.

Fred, who had listened with astonishment to Minnie's cataloguing of details he had not noticed at all, nevertheless had his own little observations he wanted to express.

"Well," said he, "the thing that got me was our grand entrance. I'd like to know how that fellow happened to open the front door so pat. It was kind of uncanny. I'll bet it wouldn't happen so neat again in a thousand years."

"It would happen the next time you went up there," Minnie broke in impatiently. "It was just part of the exquisite detail I was telling of."

"Hold your horses!" cried Fred, "I want to understand this. How'd they know we were coming? Do they keep a lookout?"

"He was the doorman, I tell you!" repeated Minnie.

But Fred refused to think this explained the situation.

"Do you mean to claim," he returned skeptically, "that that big husky fellow has nothing to do but stand there and open that door?"

"Of course I do. It's the usual thing in a really well-appointed house."

"Well," doubted Fred, "I bet he saw us coming from the dining-room window. Or, anyway, I bet they've got some sort of electric bell or something you drive over when you come in."

"Don't be silly!" Minnie overrode him. "If you had even read of such things you would know that every continental or English house of any consequence has its doorman."

Fred was half convinced, more by her manner than her words.

"Well," he commented, "I wonder if he's got another up in the bathroom holding his toothbrush till he wants to use it."

Minnie, having at last thrust aside this silly obstruction, went on with the details of appointment. Fred resumed his cigar, but obviously he was not satisfied.

"Look here, Cousin Jim!" he broke in suddenly, smitten with a recollection, "I forgot you'd been there, too. How about it? Was that fellow doing the doorman trick when you called?"

"No," said Cousin Jim, "I had to ring, all right."

"Aha!" chortled Fred, "what did I tell you!"

Minnie threw up her hands in despair. "Certainly the doorman would not be there except in calling hours. Don't you remember he said Cousin Jim had been there before breakfast?" Minnie's torrent was by this deflected into another channel, "Why in the *world* did you do such a thing as that, Cousin Jim!" she cried reproachfully.

"It was before his breakfast; not before mine," replied Cousin Jim calmly. "It didn't matter: he was up."

"Well," agreed Fred, reluctantly convinced at last, "at the present high wages he *must* be rich to keep people around for that kind of thing. I wonder what the old boy *is* worth?"

"About twelve million dollars," announced Cousin Jim.

This placid statement struck them breathless. Fred was the first to recover.

"Where'd you get that?" he demanded.

"I got it this morning when I called."

"Oh, Cousin *Jim!*" cried Minnie. "How could you! How could you!"

"Why, it was kind of interesting to know," submitted Cousin Jim.

Minnie gave it up. Struggle as she might she had never been able to keep even with this sort of thing, and she probably never would. What must the cultivated old man be thinking of their vulgarities! Camilla cast her a sympathetic glance; but the others, even Freeman, seemed lost in wonder at the amount. Fred wondered where in thunder he had got it. Freeman pointed out that just the income must be over a half million a year.

"That alters the situation completely," Fred greeted this calculation humorously. "He can have his Royal Toothbrush Holder, and somebody to dip his pen for him when he signs checks." He waked into enthusiasm; "By George, that gang at the club that

was joshing me this morning will laugh out of the other sides of their mouths when they get these figures! Why, he could buy and sell the whole lot of them, old Atkins included!"

"He has the force of real personality," put in Freeman. "When he was in the bank this morning everybody felt it. He *knows*, thank Heaven! and now he'll show people how things should be done properly. The trouble with these little towns is that they always laugh at any one who really tries to do things right. They will hardly laugh at Mr. Kirby."

"My goodness!" cried Camilla, "I shall be scared to death of him!"

Minnie contributed nothing to this, but her eyes were shining. For the first time her thoughts had soared unchecked into regions that dropped her present surroundings far below. All the inhibitions and limitations imposed on her by the present circumstances disappeared for the moment, all the heretofore unlooked-for physical textures of life moved in from the mythical to the possible.

After the talk had a little slackened, it occurred to Fred to ask Cousin Jim, who had sat by in silence, what he thought about it all.

"I find it terrifying," said the latter soberly. "I confess I cannot visualize a twelve-million-dollar man any more than I can visualize twelve million dollars. But I can see that such a sum must be a paralyzing handicap. I confess that I am an abject coward before the mere thought of having to own any such wealth. Thank God, I've been spared that!—though I suppose it's also cowardly to say so."

Fred laughed. "Well, I feel brave myself: I wouldn't mind trying it on."

But Cousin Jim seemed to have dropped his usual whimsicality. "I'd like to know how far he's overcome the handicap," he continued. "He seemed to me like a decent old chap underneath it all. Still, it stands to reason he must show some scars and warping. They all do."

"Really, Cousin Jim," cried Minnie, vexed, "sometimes I think you're almost a socialist!"

"Well, my dear," replied Cousin Jim, equably, "I don't think I am, as I understand it. All I'm saying is that twelve million dollars is an awful lot of money, and it takes a pretty far-developed man to keep from getting swung by it; and if he's

swung by it, he gets badly hurt; and if he does not, he shows the warpings and the scars of struggle. That satisfactory?"

"I don't know what in the world you are driving at. Why do you persist in talking such *impractical* nonsense, Cousin Jim? Why don't you discuss a subject sensibly once in a while?"

Cousin Jim's whimsy again twinkled in his eyes.

"My dear, that's a good idea," he said. He arose and stretched his long form. "Well, good-night." He stood for a moment in a brown study, as though he had forgotten to move further. Then he aroused himself and went toward the door. "By George!" he said, "I wish I knew how to help the poor devil keep his hold!"

IV

The manner of Cousin Jim's visit was this. He rang the bell of the old Kirby mansion that morning shortly after nine o'clock. After considerable delay the manservant opened the door. At first he denied the visitor any chance of admittance, stating positively that Mr. Kirby received no one at that hour; but on hearing Cousin Jim's name he showed a little doubt. Finally he disappeared for instructions, leaving Cousin Jim in the hall. After a few minutes the old man himself appeared, fully dressed, except that he wore a long wadded silk dressing gown in lieu of his coat.

"I am delighted that you have done me the honour," said Mr. Kirby. "Will you accompany me to the breakfast room? Perhaps you will join me at breakfast?"

"Oh, I've had breakfast," replied Cousin Jim. It did not occur to him to apologize for a too early visit. He followed the old man to the "breakfast room," which proved to be a niche adapted from a piece of the old conservatory.

"I'll just sit and talk a few minutes," said Cousin Jim. "Intended to gather in the rest of the family and come in style, but I was on my way to visit a friend—a neighbour of yours—and I thought I'd drop in."

"I am delighted you did so," rejoined Mr. Kirby. His keen eyes were taking Cousin Jim in minutely. "You say a neighbour of mine? My information was that all of my neighbours had moved."

"There's quite a few of them yet," replied Cousin Jim, drily, "all around you. This one I'm speaking of lives in a little white house just beyond your big gates."

"I see." Mr. Kirby paused, a little puzzled. "Did I understand you to say a friend?" he enquired cautiously.

"Yes. He's a real person—very interesting—inspiring. Iron-worker down at Atkins's place."

"You may be right, of course"—Mr. Kirby's politeness conceded what it was perfectly evident his conviction withheld—"but I have never found people in that class of life inspiring."

"You are perfectly correct in general," agreed Cousin Jim; unexpectedly, for the old gentleman had almost thought him classified. "Mighty few of them are inspiring, except in these noble books of fiction. I never could see why there was supposed to be an inherent virtue just in working with your hands; especially when you have to. Of course, mere brute force is inspiring sometimes. But this chap I speak of is ambitious: he has the up-leaping spark."

"H'm!" Mr. Kirby shook his head, "I am perfectly familiar with the species. Restless and discontented with his station in life."

"That's looking at it only part way," submitted Cousin Jim. "Rather he is discontented with what is smothering and twisting him. He is anxious to break the crust and occupy a wider radius of life."

"A philosopher, eh?" was the comment.

In one less polished this would have been a sneer; but a light skepticism was all the old gentleman permitted himself to express.

"Oh, no," disclaimed Cousin Jim. "He hasn't thought it out. But that's what he really is after."

The subject did not interest Mr. Kirby at all, but to his surprise Cousin Jim was beginning to.

"What particular form does this ambition take?" he enquired further. "I don't believe I quite understand your idea. Would you mind elaborating?"

Cousin Jim crossed his long legs and leaned back. Certainly he would not mind elaborating: generally he found elaboration unpopular.

"I mean that the manifestation of his ambition to break the crust, to occupy a wider radius of life, is as yet entirely instinctive, not intelligent. If you should ask him, he couldn't tell you what he wanted. Oh, yes, he'd probably make you quite a speech on higher wages, or shorter hours, or something of that sort. But that isn't it. That isn't what he wants."

"No, really?" said Mr. Kirby, with delicate irony.

"No. He is just reacting against the crust over his soul, but he does not know how or why. He may not work out: I don't know. But he is a dear fellow and a noble soul."

"I do not quite follow: but you interest me. How do you mean, not work out? Not rise in the world?"

"Partly that. But what I really meant was that he might not find out what his instincts really mean, this blind battering desire of his to break the crust."

Mr. Kirby smiled.

"I am afraid," said he, "that your man's situation is far from unique. It is the disease of the times. In the old days a labouring man was contented with his lot: now he is restless."

"There's a difference," insisted Cousin Jim, "there's a vast difference between the man who envies bitterly and strikes out blindly with passion, and the man who has a strong instinct to free his soul. But wouldn't you rather see a man struggle for *something*, even though it's a wrong something, than not struggle at all?"

Mr. Kirby pushed aside his coffee cup and lighted a cigarette from the match the dark foreign-looking man held for him.

"I can't say I would," he said. "But you have not defined. Does your friend's ambition then seek no other outlet than higher wages and shorter hours and the rest of the modern anarchistic unrest?"

"The outlet doesn't matter, I tell you," repeated Cousin Jim, "I really haven't paid much attention to that. Come to think of it, I believe it's some sort of workingman's paper at present: last year it was something to do with unions or strikes. I don't keep track of it all."

"What is it precisely you do keep track of, then?"

"His growing force," replied Cousin Jim, promptly. "No," he answered a gesture of protest, "I don't mean his influence over the men, or anything like that. I mean the force within him: the force that an unawakened life never develops. It's a half-baked sort of thing, of course, but there is force and there is tough fibre. You see, you've got to have tough fibre to get freedom of soul. The trouble is that while you're toughening it, you're apt to deform it so badly that it's no good."

Mr. Kirby was finding Cousin Jim quite different from the reports he had been at pains to command. But evidently he felt that now it was time to impose his own point of view.

"I should gather from your own statement," he pronounced, with a deepening of his courteous urbanity, "that your friend is a dangerous and undesirable person, filled with the class discontent that is the menace of our times. You will not mind my speaking frankly in the interests of this most engaging discussion?"

"Not a bit," Cousin Jim reassured him cheerfully. Then he proceeded in the most astonishing fashion to concede the point. "He's dangerous, I admit. So is any real force until it is directed by intelligence. But there's no sense at all in applying intelligence until you've got the force. That's the usual mistake. But I should not call him undesirable. To my mind the undesirable is the inert man, the unawakened man."

"The contented citizen," commented Mr. Kirby with a fine sarcasm.

"Exactly. Worst sort, as things are now. The seething force is *bound* to break through the crust somehow: the inert force never."

"You are, then, an apostle of discontent?" probed Mr. Kirby.

"Not as you mean the word. Turn it inside out: I am hopeless of the man who is contented."

Mr. Kirby looked at him thoughtfully.

"I am contented," he challenged, "I want nothing more from life. I have the means to gratify my tastes: I possess the tastes. I flatter myself that I have definite standards to which I try to conform."

But Cousin Jim refused to enter the personal aspect.

"You are one of the fortunate ones," sufficed him for reply.

Mr. Kirby persisted. He was no more interested in his own case than he had been in that of the ironworker, but he was increasingly intrigued by his relative.

"You will forgive my being personal, but I should really much like to get your point of view. I will tell you frankly that before coming here to take up my residence I informed myself through judgments in which I had a certain confidence of the people with whom I would come in contact. Among others I obtained information concerning yourself."

Cousin Jim leaned back and laughed with ready and genuine amusement.

"And learned that I was a lazy, worthless, impractical old scoundrel," he surmised. "I know."

"I was told," amended Mr. Kirby, "that while living most simply and possessed of most moderate means, you yet appeared wholly satisfied and were making no effort to increase them. Does not this imply that you are also contented?"

"With the moderate means? Oh, abundantly and entirely," agreed Cousin Jim, "but I am far from contented—though I am beginning to be more so."

"If it is not too delicate a subject——?" suggested the old gentleman.

"I am trying to become educated," said Cousin Jim.

Mr. Kirby appeared to consider this.

"That," he commented at last, "is even more interesting. Would you feel like telling me what line of studies you pursue?"

"I am simply trying to find out how to live with myself and the universe," replied Cousin Jim.

Again Mr. Kirby considered.

"You are a philosopher," was his identification of this.

Cousin Jim laughed.

"I suppose you could call me something formidable like that—if you *had* to label me," he acknowledged.

"You are making progress?"

"A little."

"And your conclusions?"

"I have nothing so definite. I have made merely a few first steps."

"Ah! And what, in two words, *is* the first step toward living with oneself and the universe?" asked Mr. Kirby.

"In two words: awakening consciousness," replied Cousin Jim.

He arose to take his leave.

"You must come to see me again," said Mr. Kirby, "I shall always be glad to see you, though I consider it probable we shall agree on very few points,—but that will be interesting in itself."

Near the foot of the driveway Cousin Jim met the personal servant returning apparently from some errand at the gate. Cousin Jim nodded at him in a friendly fashion. The man hesitated, then stopped.

"How are you getting along?" queried Cousin Jim. "It must be kind of tough sometimes to be so far away from home among strange people."

"Thank you, monsieur," he replied, "but the cure is to keep *affaire*—what you call 'busy.'"

"That is true!" cried Cousin Jim heartily, "and I must say you have used the cure. I used to know this old place when Mr. Kirby's father was alive: and you certainly have done wonders in a short time."

The Frenchman made an expressive gesture of disclaiming.

"The old arrangement was impossible," he said. "It would not have suited Monsieur for even a single day. Naturally, I could not take to myself the responsibility of a permanent installation; but I did of my best for temporary until Monsieur has the leisure to attend to it himself."

"Temporary!" cried Cousin Jim, then chuckled. "Strikes me a lot of money was spent for a temporary alteration."

The man shrugged.

"Ah, but when one has twelve million——"

"Twelve million?" repeated Cousin Jim curiously, "is that his fortune?" A deep solicitude flashed into his eyes, "Oh, poor devil!" he cried.

v

As soon as Minnie and Fred had left the house after the evening call previously described, Mr. Kirby rang a bell and at once mounted the stairs. He proceeded to a small cozy sitting room, or a large dressing room, as you please, that contained, among other things, a single big armchair and a small table before an open fireplace. Here, in response to the ring, the Frenchman was already waiting. He deftly relieved Mr. Kirby of his coat, helped him into the silk dressing robe, and offered him a box of long slim cigars. The old gentleman selected one of these, lighted it at the match instantly presented, and sank with a luxurious sigh into the easy chair. On the small table lay a book. The Frenchman placed alongside it a tiny glass of liqueur, took one last glance around, and was about to withdraw, when he was arrested by his employer's voice.

"Come here, Marcel," commanded Mr. Kirby, "I have something to say."

Marcel noiselessly crossed the room to the corner of the mantel and waited. For some time the old gentleman stared into the fireplace; then seemed to arouse himself with an effort.

"You are satisfied with your situation?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Nevertheless," pointed out Mr. Kirby, "you are called upon

to perform many services generally considered incongruous to a person of your quality. You are, I believe, at times footman, valet, butler, major-domo, courier, to a certain extent secretary, and to a still more certain extent treasurer. I can imagine a footman acting with delight the part of secretary: I cannot imagine a secretary performing with entire equanimity the duties of a footman. You are satisfied to fulfil these varied functions?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Why?"

The man hesitated, eyeing his master keenly, trying to divine what might lie behind this strange catechism.

"The wages are good," he explained finally, "and, besides, my devotion to Monsieur——"

"We will stop at the wages," interrupted Mr. Kirby, drily. "You say they are good. Has it ever occurred to you that even for the diversified services you are called upon to perform they are rather extraordinarily good?"

Again the man hesitated: and again after a glance at the motionless figure in the armchair he decided.

"Yes, monsieur," he acknowledged, "that thought has crossed my mind."

"And your explanation?"

"Monsieur's generosity——" began Marcel, but checked himself at a sharp movement of impatience. "It seemed to me," he went on boldly, "that perhaps Monsieur wished to make it not worth my while to be other than honest."

The figure in the chair shook with genuine laughter. That the sight was almost as unprecedented to Marcel as to our experience of the old gentleman might be guessed by a fleeting expression that crossed his impassive features.

Evidently even Mr. Kirby felt that so genuine and unusual an emotion required explanation.

"One is always pleased when one's judgment is justified," he said. "You are partly right. But only partly. I have wished, it is true, to engage willing and honest service: but also I have wished to engage keen wits, brains. Heretofore I have had occasion to use only the honest and willing service. Now the time has come to use the brains."

Marcel bowed without comment; but an alert sparkle of interest appeared in his eye.

"As you are perfectly aware," went on Mr. Kirby after a

moment spent in contemplation, "my last hopes for the succession of my own line have become extinct. Fate has deprived me of an heir." In spite of his polished control a tremor of feeling for a single instant vibrated through his tones; though he instantly recovered himself. Marcel bent in a discreet and respectful sympathy. "It thus happens," Mr. Kirby continued, "that precisely here dwell the only surviving members of my family, and therefore my only legal heirs. In the natural course of events my fortune would go to them." The figure sat forward in the chair in sudden energy. "That shall not be unless they are worthy!" he cried. He dropped back again. "In short, I have come to this place solely to determine the fitness of these people to continue the fortune and the tradition that I have established. Neither is inconsiderable," he added, a little haughtily. He paused to allow Marcel an opportunity for comment, of which the Frenchman was too clever to take advantage.

"That is the question that now confronts me," continued the old man, "whether the family of Kirby can take its place worthily, or whether it is better that it continue in its obscurity. You have to-day seen all the members of that family. I desire your opinion of them."

"Ah, monsieur!" protested Marcel, "it is scarcely *convenable*——"

"Do as I tell you and speak your thought!" commanded Mr. Kirby sharply. "If I find I am not getting what I have kept you for, your brains——" He checked himself, "Come, I absolve you from all disrespect. You are my other eyes, my spectacles, and I would look through you. I have selected you for certain qualities: use them. What of these people? The stock is good."

"It could not be otherwise, since it is of the race of Monsieur," submitted Marcel. He still hesitated, his sharp eyes trying to penetrate the mask before him, his keen wits trying to estimate the situation, to determine just how literally he should take the admonition to frankness.

"Well," prompted his master at last, "how about the Mr. Kirby who called this morning?"

Marcel made up his mind. Some of the servant-veneer fell from him; his mask softened so that the lines of his face at least partially expressed the keen intelligence within.

"Without doubt he is a gentleman," he estimated slowly.

"That shows itself plainly enough. But he is an *excentrique*. Such as he may be very great gentlemen, in fact, but they shine as the satellites better than as the heads of great families." The figure in the chair chuckled slightly. "By the way, monsieur," added Marcel, "as you commanded, I met him in the park and conveyed to his intelligence the colossal size of your fortune."

"Indeed? And in what manner did he accept it?"

Marcel showed a faint emotion that might have been embarrassment.

"Monsieur will not believe," he deprecated. "It is incredible. He said only, 'Oh, poor devil.'"

Mr. Kirby chuckled for some moments over this, but made no comment.

"Continue," he said at length, "and the younger Mr. Kirby who called this evening?"

"He is very American," ventured Marcel, cautiously.

"Speak out! Speak out!" cried Mr. Kirby irascibly, "or I shall think my bargain in you a poor one!"

"He is very simple, monsieur, very simple and crude. He has simple ideas and very few: but he is strong. He will love simple things of the home, and crude pleasures. Art and music mean nothing to him. He adores his wife and will follow her blindly always."

"You are describing a *bourgeois* of the provinces."

Marcel bowed.

"Exactly, monsieur," he agreed.

"H'm," ruminated Mr. Kirby, "—and Madame?"

"Of great and restless ambition, monsieur," stated Marcel boldly. He had been watching his employer and had become more certain of his ground. "Of great and restless energy. She thirsts for life. She will go far. Whether she will go in the right direction, who knows? She is not too sure of herself. She may become so."

"Restless?" commented Uncle. "That is it. No repose: no harmony. That after all is essential to the *grande dame*. Not too promising material on your showing, Marcel."

"May I point out to Monsieur that Madame is *enciente*?" suggested Marcel.

Again Mr. Kirby sat upright, and this time he struck lightly the arm of his chair.

"By Godfrey, Marcel," he cried, "I begin to think that my

belief in you is justified. That is it! The next generation!" He considered for a moment. "That will be all for the present, Marcel. You have pleased me. Now that you know my thought, I shall expect your coöperation, your intelligent coöperation. And Marcel," he added, "if until my death my family is as your own, you will find that you have been remembered as one of them."

CHAPTER IX

I

IN SPITE of considerable opposition and uneasiness on account of her condition, Minnie made the effort of her life on the "simple home dinner"; and fortunately it was in every way successful. If things had gone wrong, it is extremely probable that, denied its legitimate outlet of satisfaction, Minnie's tension might have exploded disastrously. But none of the usual contretemps occurred. Even the row with Fred over asking Cousin Jim proved to have been wasted. Minnie was too high-strung to stand any opposition: those who loved her should have seen to it that in every possible fashion the way be made smooth—heaven knows she wasn't doing all this for herself; and if anybody else had been capable of taking hold, she would have been only too glad to have resigned; and the least they could do was to refrain from interference. Nevertheless, Fred proved unexpectedly obstinate. He was unhappy about it, and distressed, and he looked like a big worried boy over Minnie: it would have been very easy for him to settle the whole matter by the simple expedient of eliminating himself. But he did not. This was a welcoming party for a relative: it would be indecent not to have all relatives there: Cousin Jim was a relative—the syllogism was perfect. Minnie had to give way, and the tremendousness and tension of the occasion turned her usual half-humorous acquiescence into a sort of baffled impotent rage. However, Cousin Jim came properly dressed, and he behaved himself rather better than excellently. Strangely enough this did not appease Minnie in the least: it showed he could do it when he gave his mind to it.

Freeman proved invaluable on details. He vetoed the idea of music, pointing out that the note to be held to was a "simple small dinner." He vetoed a too diversified offering of wine.

"Serve sherry with the soup, and champagne later. But have them both good."

Although he did not smoke cigars himself, he examined Fred's

brands with the eye of an expert, rejected them, and sent in an order for some of his own choosing. There was much discussion, some of it a little heated, over the service to be had at the local caterer's. It was habituated, but possessed no distinction. Fred could not see why, since the dinner was to be a small one, the "girl" shouldn't wait on table as usual, with perhaps the aid of her Swedish cousin; but in the underground solitude to which his immediately chastened and chastised spirit wormishly descended he had leisure to digest the concluding statement that his ideas were absurd. He did not emerge from this seclusion to offer any more unsolicited advice.

"There is nothing that makes the tone of an entertainment more than the service," continued Freeman, after this little Fred-job had been finished. "There is more distinction in a chop perfectly served than in a banquet badly handled."

At last an order was sent to the city, four hundred miles away, for two competent men. The worm stuck his head out at this and managed to attract unfavourable notice by some nonsense about expense; but a sudden cyclone drove him below again.

The day of the party was most feverish. Minnie was on edge with hysterical excitement, riding high, keyed up to the limit; therefore very efficient. She set the table with her own hands. Freeman cast a critical eye and approved, except that he pulled down and rearranged the centrepiece.

"All right for a big show, Sis, but the fiction of a small show is general conversation; that people are going to talk across the table. So keep the decorations low."

Freeman *was* a comfort! He then proceeded to drill Fred in the etiquette of port; impressing the exact procedure over and over—how the servants would remove the cloth, how the decanter must *always* pass around the table in the one direction——

"Do you mean to tell me that if the fellow who wants more is right next me on my right, I can't give him the bottle? that I've got to send it all the way around the table?" snorted Fred.

"Certainly."

"Well, for the love of Mike, will you give me any sane reason for such a fool performance?"

"It's the way it's done," stated Freeman, conclusively.

It seemed to him advisable to rearrange the lower floor. Fred's armchair and smoking set were banished to the woodshed. Fred himself was permitted to carry them there. As a favour it was

on a par with allowing the condemned man to spring his own drop. He saw no sense whatever in such a performance. If Uncle were ever to come to the house again, he'd have to see that chair. Eventually; why not now? But as Fred by now realized that this was not his night to howl, he muttered these things to himself.

The day gyrated by. Eight o'clock—which Fred considered was getting on toward bedtime—approached. The party loomed at hand like a new theatrical performance half rehearsed. Minnie, afire, dressed hastily. The issue was in the hands of the gods.

Over the selection of the guests she and Freeman had spent much thought. The Pines, of course, as he was the leading banker, the solid citizen of the community; and for the same reason the Atkinses of the Iron Works. Old Lady Watkins was a one best bet when the agony was to be piled on: Mattie Walker's status as the leading ingénue had never been questioned. So far the choice was automatic. Then, after some hesitation, the Cadwells were included. Bert was dull, but he was the correctest-looking thing outside a collar advertisement; if he said nothing, he said that nothing well; and he ran the family silver candelabra a close race as a sheer table ornament. Kitty was good-looking, showed good taste in her simple gowns, but above all was vivaciously fresh and youngly impulsive both in appearance and viewpoint. Minnie shrewdly pointed out that if Uncle was to be charmed by any of the younger generation, it would be rather by frank naïveté than by what would be to his accustomed eyes only a partial sophistication. That made thirteen people, with one woman still to supply. The natural candidate must have been Camilla. That faithful damsel had as usual been right on the job, had done most of the dirty work, had lavished some two hundred thousand words on the occasion. But to be a born leader you have to be ruthless; or at least so the school of square-jawed fiction tells us. Smiting the expectant puppy dog in the face is nothing. It is the situation that must be considered, not the individual. There was no doubt that Camilla's gush, her really rather absurd bleached hair, her obviously home-made gowns that gave the effect of coloured cheesecloth, were none of them in the picture. It hurts me more than it does you; but off with her head! Minnie invited the younger of the two Misses Morton—the people who lived in the other old mansion below

the Hill. Miss Morton was a stiff and formal old maid; but she did represent the older aristocracy, however dull.

An observer might have reviewed this collection with a little wonder over their incongruity, and considerable skepticism as to the result. But such an observer would have forgotten the tremendous power of a unifying idea. Ordinarily uncongenial, they were now animated by a single purpose—to please and impress old Mr. Kirby; and so they attained welded solidarity.

The seating at the table had also been carefully thought out. The Farnum team, brother and sister, were geniuses in their way: there was no doubt of that. They planted Cousin Jim safely on Minnie's left with Miss Morton on his other side. It was felt that this completely insulated him for he could not even talk to Uncle across the table. Kitty Cadwell was on the other side of the guest of honour.

As the evening went on, Minnie's nervousness abated. Her first febrile brilliancy relaxed to a feeling of uneasy triumph. Mr. Kirby was a stunning success, of course, with his exquisite manners, his bizarre and striking appearance, his cynical air of the Old World. Kitty's naïve chatter apparently pleased him: he had the appearance of being benignantly amused. The imported servants were wonderful. Everything had the air of smooth effortlessness which is the height of art.

But when finally it came time for the women to withdraw, the hostess was swept by a panic. The arrangement by which she had insulated Cousin Jim on her left was admirable only as long as she was there to act as the insulating material. Her departure left Cousin Jim and the guest of honour next to each other! However, Freeman quietly but quickly slipped into her place. Again her heart went out in gratitude to Freeman as the marvel of modern times.

The average male conversation of Little Falls was either commercial, or sporting, or chaffing. Freeman led it firmly into broader channels. He was gladly, even gratefully, suffered to do so. Every solid citizen present realized that something "intellectual" would be appropriate to the entertainment of the stranger—the polished, polite, formidable stranger; but they had no notion of what kind of intellectual it should be; and anyway, they felt incompetent to handle any sort whatever. If this young man could do the job, for heaven's sake let him do it! So they smoked owlishly and looked wise while Freeman and Mr. Kirby talked.

If Mr. Kirby had not been present, they would have been bored to death; or, more likely, would have ridiculed the conversation back into familiar channels; but to-night they were uncertain, and were glad to have present what appeared to be an expert to take the job off their hands.

Mr. Kirby played back amiably. He savoured the port and found it not bad; he listened to the young man and found the superficial impressions pleasant; he smoked the cigar, which was surprisingly to his liking; and his black young eyes strayed from face to face about the table. As they rose to rejoin the ladies, Freeman had his reward.

"You must do me the pleasure of calling on me soon," said Mr. Kirby. "Come and talk to me. I will give orders that you are to be admitted at any time."

In the drawing room Mr. Kirby punctiliously circulated, paying his disconcertingly gracious attention to each of the ladies in turn. When the round had been completed, he took his departure.

Minnie, triumphant, went to bed sick.

II

This success had a number of small sequences.

For one thing Fred put his foot down. The party was all right; it was a wonder: Minnie was a wonder: Freeman was a wonder; anything or anybody you pleased was a wonder—BUT! Minnie owed it to herself, to, him, and especially to Fred Junior to COME OFF! And strangely enough Minnie, after a moment of conventional rebellion, found herself acquiescing. Somehow it was a relief to let everything go, social duty, "housekeeping" in the old fierce sense, outside obligation, everything: to sink back into irresponsibility: and to have an excuse for doing so that was conventionally acceptable. Dear Minnie is not going out; she cannot be expected to attend the committee meetings; she should not be bothered with annoyances. And instead of being considered a malingerer, she was to be applauded.

Mr. Kirby returned home from the party considerably impressed. He had expected something a trifle on the flamboyant side, with a good deal of hostess effort sticking out all over it. To Marcel (as that useful citizen assisted his retiring) he expressed a little of his gratification.

"I would point out to Monsieur that a tremendous effort has been made," suggested Marcel, astutely.

"Matters went very smoothly in my opinion," stated his employer. "Why do you say that?"

Marcel, who had accepted as genuine his new function, told the details of mechanism, as he had learned them through the tradesmen, the servants, the underground channels.

Mr. Kirby nodded thoughtfully.

"I see," he said. "It is better of course that such things come as a usual mode of life rather than as the tremendous effort. Nevertheless, it shows the possibility is there. I am not displeased."

The third minor sequence to the party was Freeman's early call. His visit was not a great success. The fragments of his conversation at the dinner table, combined with the fact that emergency had produced a temporary super-Freeman, had given Mr. Kirby an exaggerated idea of the young man's capacity. To-day he came, animated not by a desire outside himself, but by an anxiety to show his cultural superiority to Little Falls, and to please at all hazards. It can't be done. People neither please nor convince when their main effort is toward the effect on any one. The only solid method is to reveal what is within us and what we are. It is legitimate to hope it may appeal either to the intelligence or the heart of the other man. Freeman looked on Mr. Kirby's bibelots with respect, and raked up something esthetically intelligent to say about them.

"You've been reading Sunderland," remarked Mr. Kirby, with what appeared to be a faint indulgence.

Indeed, he proved to have little respect for any of Freeman's paraded authorities; and as the latter had really no opinion to defend, he tried to recover ground by hedging. That is never a successful manœuvre: you have to have room for it, and you have to be rather successful with smoke screens. Freeman was conscious that his stock was off several points since opening, which did not help his case. His sentences became stilted and involved, and his views "cultivated" and obviously fresh from the can. Mr. Kirby left the whole width of the conversational field vacant and from the side lines watched terribly Freeman's attempts to make an awkward squad look like a parade. The young man found himself desperately searching for conversational topics; a new experience for his easy-going mind. Irresistibly forced itself on him the impression of holding to the bars with all four hands and gibbering. And the terrible old

man, quite at ease, surveyed him appraisingly from behind a perfect courtesy.

Mr. Kirby did not discuss this connection of the family with Marcel. When the young man took his departure, the old gentleman looked after him amusedly.

"Plated ware," he remarked to empty space.

CHAPTER X

I

FREEMAN left the house badly shattered. His dream of equality was dissipated. Most evidently his cherished refinements did not impress the old man in the slightest. Of course that was the old man's fault. He was too self-centred, too old to admit of new impressions, too hide-bound to modify himself. Never again for Freeman!

At this point he encountered Mattie Walker. So occupied was he with his own thoughts that he failed to observe that young lady until he had all but passed her, though Heaven knows her mere presence shrieked itself aloud to the universe. Mattie's light knew nothing of bushels.

When he was delicately assisted to a recognition of her passing before it was too late, he wheeled instantly to accompany her. It was recognized in Little Falls that Freeman and Mattie were conducting an "affair," and the fact was acknowledged to be entirely natural and inevitable, as between the admitted masters of the art. The younger people observed, in worshipful attention to details and manœuvres; the older stood by in acid comment, flavoured with aphorisms concerning "the biter bit," "fighting fire with fire," and the like. Fred had jocosely suggested that Freeman take his trunk with him to the Walkers', and had promptly learned how cheap and vulgar such wit was held by the truly refined. The two played with the punctilio of fencers. The proper flowers, books, candies; the appropriate advances, recoils, acceptances, and withdrawals; the customary coquetries, minor quarrels, and small reconciliations, together with their *ripistes*, succeeded each other as gracefully and inevitably as the posturings of a minuet. Both Freeman and Mattie felt that only so much was expected of their high estate.

"I must say you looked very profound," observed Mattie, when they had fallen into step.

"I have just been to call on old Mr. Kirby," replied Freeman.

"It's refreshing to find a man who speaks your language who has travelled and observed."

"He's a stunning looking old thing," agreed Mattie.

"You know, Mattie," pursued Freeman, "I wouldn't say it to anybody but you; they'd think I was snobbish or stuck on myself, but while the men in this town are the nicest sort of fellows, they *are* very limited."

Mattie laughed.

"You needn't tell me, my dear! I've suffered!"

"Well, I don't want you to think I'm egotistical, or anything like that," pursued Freeman anxiously, "I hate a fellow who's stuck on himself."

"Nobody would suspect you of being anything but a humble worm, Freeman, darling," mocked Mattie; then, as he looked doubtfully at her, she became grave. "But I do agree with you perfectly. I know the place is provincial and narrow, and how hard it is to be your real self and stand out against the deadly pressure. I don't see why Mr. Kirby has come back here."

"Neither do I," said Freeman, "I'm afraid he'll get sick of it before long."

"Well," observed Mattie, "I'm glad he is here; and I know how you feel," she glanced covertly at his handsome humourless face, "I know you'll be a great comfort to each other. I wish I were a man," she added.

"Good heavens, what a wish! What would become of me!" cried Freeman instantly. "But why?"

"Mr. Kirby is beautifully courteous: but he has no use for girls. I shall never be his intimate, as you will be."

"I don't think he will be very intimate with anybody," submitted Freeman, cautiously.

"You have so much in common," sighed Mattie. "Everybody in town knows that."

Freeman still deprecated, but he looked gratified.

"Well, good-bye," said Mattie suddenly. "I'm going in here to call on Mrs. Watkins."

"Oh," cried Freeman, "it's a half-holiday; I thought we'd get a buggy and take a drive, out to the Lake! Come on! You can call on Old Lady Watkins any time!"

"No," negatived Mattie. "She's expecting me. Run along now; and if you really want to you may drop around this evening."

She paused before ringing the doorbell to watch his straight,

correct figure as it receded beneath the cool maple street-trees. Freeman looked around. She waved her hand and he solemnly lifted his hat. Mattie chuckled to herself and pressed the button.

II

Freeman resumed his walk with a new point of view. He now saw clearly that there were other considerations besides his own personal comfort or appreciations. The opinions of others must be taken into account. It is always so with those whose natural qualifications set them above the crowd. Mr. Kirby was in prospect as uncomfortable and as terrifying as ever. But his status as a great gentleman was not to be denied: he was the real thing—a pattern to be followed. Naturally the town expected that two such remarkable men would have much in common, would be intimate. It would be misunderstood—possibly to Freeman's disadvantage—did they not become so.

Freeman quailed at the prospect of going forward with it; but he had now no intention of not going forward. After all he could reduce the actual personal contacts to a minimum. It was the public appearance that counted. The old man would not snub him before people—he felt that instinctively; so at least an appearance of intimacy should not be too difficult.

One thing, unbeknownst to himself, was a great sustaining factor. His own self-confidence and self-esteem were in no way shaken. It was Mr. Kirby who was old and cranky and dogmatic in his views and tastes.

Freeman stepped out more briskly once all these considerations had arranged themselves in his limited mentality. He did not realize it; but within the past hour a tremendous overturn had taken place in his soul. Heretofore, whatever his limitations, he had stood firmly and freely on his own standard; no thought of personal financial benefit had as yet crossed his mind. Now the Kirby millions had gained their first Little Falls sycophant.

III

Though it was a half-holiday, Freeman bent his steps toward the business part of town. He was headed for Larry's.

Larry's was situated two doors off Madison Street, handy but not obtrusive. To all appearance it was just an ordinary well-kept saloon; but for some strange reason it had been singled out

as a haunt of the younger among the gilded youth of the town. They liked to foregather there. It made them feel much more "sporty" than did the bright open bar at the hotel or the club. There was a back "room," segregated from the main apartment only by a flimsy half-partition. It contained nothing but a table and chairs. Here the gay young dogs of the town repaired to discuss long steins of cool beer, to munch "hot dogs" or swiss-cheese sandwiches, and to feel that they were leading an emancipated existence. There was little hard liquor consumed. Occasionally a real devil would get away with something on the order of a sherry flip or a Manhattan cocktail; but not often.

Freeman did not much frequent this resort. Still, as a man-about-town, he was of course familiar with Larry's.

To-day he pushed open the swinging doors and approached the bar.

"Good afternoon, Larry," said he. "Anybody in back? Besides Brady, of course!" He laughed as though at a joke. "You're always sure of him!"

The cloth with which Larry perpetually wiped his mahogany or polished his glass when not supplying drinks slid along the bar and came to rest opposite Freeman, and Larry inclined his white-clad form toward his questioner. Larry never spoke unless in strictest confidence, no matter what the subject matter of his discourse.

"None of your pals, Mr. Freeman," he imparted. "They're probably all out playing golluf. You'll probably find them out there."

Possibly one of the reasons why Larry's place was popular was just this sort of apparent interest in his customers' desires at the expense of immediate small sales. But Freeman did not turn to go out.

"Well, who is there?" he persisted.

"To tell you the truth only Mr. Brady and a friend."

Freeman nodded and passed to the back room.

"Bring me a stein," he commanded, "and set 'em up again for the others."

Larry looked after him speculatively. He prided himself on his knowledge of his clientèle and their idiosyncrasies. It never would have crossed his mind that Freeman would voluntarily seek Sam Brady's company—except for a reason.

"So-ho!" he remarked to his draped mirror.

Freeman stuck his head in the door of the back room.

"Hullo," he remarked, "is this the whole crowd?"

Sam Brady and his friend looked up. A faint surprise on Sam's square granite face gave way to an equally faint and withdrawn speculation. Freeman's manner was unwontedly free and easy, not to say jocular.

"Hullo, come in," invited Brady. "Yes, this is all of us. Meet Mr. Smith, Mr. Farnum. Mr. Smith is from the big city and has come down to look us hicks over."

The other man, whose raiment vied in chaste splendour with Sam's habiliments, nodded over his stein of beer but said nothing. Freeman drew up a chair.

"Not interrupting, am I?" he asked genially. "This is certainly the coolest place in town."

Larry brought in the drinks and set them down. Freeman went on chatting in a super-expansive fashion. He did not exactly condescend, but he laid himself out to be entertaining. Mr. Smith of the big city, who seemed to be a taciturn, not to say speechless individual, sipped his beer. Sam Brady carried his end of the chat, but the faintly puzzled look had returned to the depths of his eyes.

Brady was one of those "rising young men" just outside the pale of good society, and just outside the circle of what is known as conservative business. He knew many men intimately, but neither their women nor their clubs. His business was not easily defined. It appeared to consist a little of brokerage, a little of small independent enterprises here and there, and perhaps more than a little of underground politics. He never seemed to be busy. He never showed as a principal in anything. His relations with what is known as the sporting world were close, yet the gambles and dissipations of the sporting world either did not claim him or made no impression on his hard, compact personality. His clothes were almost aggressively well-fitting and beyond the mode; he wore a diamond in his tie and one on his finger; and yet he was not cheaply and obviously flashy. Probably he escaped this effect not so much by externals as by that same hard and compact personality just mentioned. Nobody seemed to know a thing about Sam Brady's private life or inner thoughts. It was evident he was quite self-sufficient in his own standards. Everybody, friend or enemy, associate or mere acquaintance, called him by his first name.

After a little the unexplained and taciturn Smith grunted something that might have been a farewell and went out.

"Chatty sort of a chap, your friend," laughed Freeman.

"He isn't much of a talker, for sure," agreed Sam; and waited.

Freeman leaned back in his chair with an effort toward further expansion.

"Look here, Sam," he said at last, "I want some advice."

"What kind?"

"I want to make a little outside money," elucidated Freeman, "sort of take a little flyer, you know." He laughed self-consciously. "A fellow like me never has a cent ahead."

"And you can always use it," supplemented Sam. "Sure!"

"Well, I thought perhaps you might give me a tip what to buy. Everybody says you're a wiz at that sort of thing."

Sam pulled thoughtfully at his cigar.

"Well," he said after a moment, "it's a fool thing to pass a man a tip. If he wins it's all to the good; but if he loses he's sore as a boil. There's nothing certain in this little old world."

"I know that," urged Freeman. "Perhaps I shouldn't have used the word tip. But you are a broker and I want your advice."

"Well, if you put it that way. Is this an investment or are you after a quick turnover?"

"A little extra money if the cards fall my way. If they don't, I'll do without a new overcoat," laughed Freeman. "What I want to know is, if you were in my shoes, what would you do?"

"I'd buy Cerro Gorde."

"What's that?"

"It's a mine."

"Is it a good mine?"

"Lord! I don't know. But there's a good gang fooling with it right now. You wouldn't want to keep the stuff. It's a gamble."

"What's it selling at?"

"About fifty cents or so."

"That would give me four hundred shares," calculated Freeman.

"Huh?" cried Sam.

"I only want to go in about two hundred dollars' worth," said Freeman, naming his bank balance—though he did not say so.

"If you want to gamble, why in hell do you buy outright?" demanded Sam. "Get her on margin."

"Of course; that would be better," assented Freeman, who had actually the vaguest idea of the necessary mechanism. "Look here, Sam, I know it's chicken feed, but couldn't you take care of it for me?"

Sam looked a little doubtful, slightly amused, and somewhat bored.

"You see," confessed Freeman with what was really a heroic effort, "I know you'd keep your mouth shut. It's just chicken feed, penny-ante gambling, just a flier. Amounts to nothing. But you know how these bankers are about stocks——"

Sam cut in, to his relief.

"Sure, I get you. All right: I'll fix it."

"Good for you," cried Freeman gratefully.

"How many points margin?"

"Oh, one or two, I suppose," answered Freeman, to whom the figures meant nothing at all.

Sam stared at him.

"Well," he remarked, "you're game to take a chance, anyway. I don't know whether I can fix it at any such margin, but I guess so. Only, if she pops, you won't have any chance to cover. At that figure they'll close you out without taking time to call on you to cover, if she sags. Couldn't afford to do otherwise."

"Of course not," agreed Freeman. Evidently Sam considered the margin too low; but Freeman would not now for any consideration change his figures. It had cost a terrible effort to lower his pride to disclose even so much ignorance. Freeman loathed confessing anything less than omniscience on any subject.

Sam made a note in his pocketbook.

"Send me a check Monday," he advised, "and you'd better let me put in a stop order on a selling figure if she rises. She probably won't stay up for ever."

"All right," agreed Freeman. "Use your judgment. And I say, I'm awfully grateful, you know."

"That's all right," returned Sam. "Forget it."

When Freeman emerged to the glare and heat of the street he mopped his brow and dusted his hands. It had been a severe ordeal.

CHAPTER XI

I

WITHIN a week Sam Brady handed Freeman a check for what amounted to more than a half year's salary. "There you are, my lad," said he. "You've had the luck of the devil."

Freeman stared at the slip of paper.

"I—I'd no idea it would be as much as this!" he stammered. "Why, Sam—you don't know how much obliged I am. Why, this is like *giving* it to me——"

But Sam cut him short.

"That's all right. Forget it. And, believe me, it's not like giving it to you. I'd never take any such long chances, and I'm a pretty good sport myself. These hundred-to-one shots don't get me. The double-O *does* come up once in a while, but no sensible man plunges on it."

"Oh, I know that," rejoined Freeman, who had recovered himself. "This was just a wild flier."

"Well, if it amuses you," shrugged Sam. "Me, I like gilt-edged railroad bonds when I head my little round iron men a-rolling toward Wall Street. If I'm looking for trouble, I get more fun for my money dropping it on the ponies."

Freeman thought of the stories of Sam's reputed twenty-thousand-dollar race-course bets, and shuddered. Racing seemed to him a certain method of loss.

"Let's have a drink to celebrate, anyway," he suggested as they turned in to Larry's place.

One by-product the episode did have. He saw more of Sam Brady; and it was known that he saw more of Sam Brady. The fact invested Freeman with just the faint suspicion of "sportiness" necessary to complete his fascination, like a touch of paprika on avocado.

II

Freeman lost no time in carrying out an old idea of his. The evening of the day Sam had given him the check, he opened the

subject with Minnie and Fred. He based his decision on the imminence of the little Kirby, and the fact that with its arrival all the house space would be needed, or at least could be used.

He forestalled Minnie's objections, "If you had my room available, you could spread out more comfortably, and you know it."

Minnie did know it, and for that reason her initial opposition, based on convention and affection, was the more easily silenced. But more practical objections remained.

"I've been looking around," Freeman met one of them. "You know the old Morton place? Well, out back of the house, and a little to one side, there's a little brick affair, of fair size, containing one room and a sort of closet. It's quite separate and remote from the house. Well, I can rent that. It needs decorating and furnishing, of course; but it's solid and well built. It's so close to the boundary of the Morton place that I can have a separate entrance of my own on Elm Street."

"It's such a dreadful part of town," objected Minnie.

"The Mortons and old Mr. Kirby live there," Freeman pointed out, "and after all, Sis—a bachelor apartment!"

"Can you afford it, Freeman dear?"

"Oh, yes," said Freeman carelessly, "I have a thousand dollars or so laid away, and I might as well put it in there as to keep hoarding it."

Finally it was agreed. The discussion trailed off into the protestations considered proper on the occasion of the departure of one who has perhaps stayed over long. Both sides are a little relieved, secretly conscience-stricken at feeling so, and eager to cover that naked truth with an appropriate verbal garment.

Minnie continued this amiable pose in the privacy of the conubial chamber. Dear Freeman, he will leave a big gap in our little household; the place won't be the same without him; it is such a pity the house isn't just a little bit larger. But Fred was blunt.

"I think myself it's a good thing," said he. "Of course, I'm glad Freeman has been here with us—I wouldn't have had it otherwise—but after all it'll be a good thing for him. It's a good thing for any young man making a start in life to have some sort of responsibility that he has to meet—like rent and a separate apartment—if not a wife. Steadies him."

But even Fred kept silent on the one aspect that secretly intrigued all three—that he was glad to have his own house to himself.

CHAPTER XII

I

A FOREIGN body cannot be introduced into a limited space already occupied without certain readjustments. The extent of these readjustments depends on the size of the foreign body. If the foreign body is plastic or readily soluble it is pushed and shaped into the form most convenient to that which already occupies: if it is refractory, that which already occupies has perforce to rearrange itself.

This simple law of physics, and its corollary, were beautifully exemplified in the case of Ezekiel Kirby and Little Falls. There could be no doubt that Mr. Kirby in himself was a foreign body of considerable dimension. Taken in conjunction with his twelve million he bulked very large indeed.

There were a great many people in Little Falls with very definite ideas as to the shaping of just such foreign bodies. Indeed, certain organizations and institutions having to do with charity and progress seemed definitely organized with that end in view. There remained only to test out the chemical and physical constituents of this new substance.

Fred had not boasted idly when he told his kinsman that the Little Falls Chamber of Commerce was composed of live ones. Mr. Kirby almost immediately received from that body an invitation to a luncheon where it was promised he would receive valuable information as to the city of his residence, much honour, and an opportunity to speak. He returned a courteous refusal. The secretary then called in person, and was permitted to leave his card and to learn that Mr. Kirby was not at home. The Committee on Promotion then suggested that an interview would be productive of much enlightenment, and named an hour at which it would present itself, unless it heard that the time would be inconvenient.

"If you ask him to make a date, he may stall us off," said Quinn, the secretary. "Believe me, I know."

Quinn was what was later known as a go-getter. He was heavy set, alert, and entirely surrounded by card-indexes on all sorts of subjects.

Receiving no veto to the suggestion the committee called at the hour named. It found itself received by Marcel, who suavely and sympathetically conveyed the information that he acted in the capacity of Monsieur's confidential secretary, and that it was Monsieur's invariable custom to transact all matters of a business nature through him. If these messieurs would therefore state exactly what proposals they had to bring to Monsieur Kirby's attention, he, Marcel, would be happy to see that they were carefully considered.

At this there was considerable restrained indignation. The Promotion Committee considered itself collectively and individually somewhat of importance. Its business was with the principal, not with the servant.

"I assure you, messieurs," said Marcel in answer to this point of view, "that Monsieur Kirby's methods in these matters are fixed. If you would be so good as to state the nature of your business——"

The Promotion Committee would not be so good.

"In that case," said Marcel politely, "I shall convey to Monsieur your sentiments and communicate to you his desires."

On that they were forced at last to withdraw.

"Damned purse-proud stiff-necked old idiot!" was the mildest of Atkins's comments as they retreated down the drive. "What does he think he is, anyway? Let him go to hell for all of me!"

But sober second thoughts prevailed. The old man was difficult, to be sure, but difficulties were made to be overcome. After all, why be a go-getter if you don't go and get? Quinn pledged himself to obtain an interview. The old gentleman had lived long abroad, and had his little ways. He did not realize.

Quinn had attained his proud eminence by natural ability, hard work, and much perusal of Upward and Onward literature. His desk was flanked with small neatly printed cards each held upright on a standard imparting admonitions such as *Do it now!* *Never say die!* *This is my busy day!* *Service is the price of good will!* and many others. From this collection he could always select something to fit any case. Then all he had to do was to live up to it. I do not know which he picked for this occasion, but its purport must have been never to take "no" for an answer.

The persistency of his gadfly methods brought results. He was able at last triumphantly to send word to his fellow members on the Promotion Committee that Mr. Ezekiel Kirby would receive them punctually at three o'clock Thursday afternoon.

For a second time, then, the Committee with the indefatigable Quinn at their head, were admitted to the Kirby mansion. It had been agreed that Atkins, as the most important, was to introduce the general subject of Little Falls growth and progress and to indicate the shoulder-to-shoulder whole-hearted, unselfish, energetic enthusiasm with which each and every citizen was permanently animated. All that would then be necessary would be to indicate that Mr. Kirby must now consider himself a citizen of Little Falls. The inference would be sufficiently obvious. Then Atkins was to retire in favour of Quinn who would explain details and make specific recommendations. These must be, (a) become a member of the Chamber, (b) permit the use of his name on certain committees, and (c) give aid and comfort by the purchase of stock in the Chamber's present big effort to establish the piano industry. Quinn had all the statistics of the latter enterprise neatly tabulated in two columns so they could be grasped at a glance of the eye. Column A showed all about pianos, and how much they cost to make, and how many American Homes were without them, and what proportion the latter figures bore to the mean annual income of the American Family, and how many homes had them and how mean *their* annual income was, ending with an abrupt switch to triumphant red figures that proved the whole thing was a holy cinch. Column B showed how many more workmen would have to come in to Little Falls, and how much they would eat, and how many houses they would require, and how much raw material they would handle, and how many trains of cars it would take to bring it in, ending also with red ink in a bewildering apparent non-sequiter that read Two Hundred Thousand Population by 1900! It was very compact and ingenious and convincing; and Quinn was proud of it.

The delegation waited for a brief moment in the dim outer hall, then were ushered into the curtained little reception room by the imperturbable younger footman. Mr. Kirby, very erect, very precise, very formal, stood in the centre, his eyeglasses mounted.

"Gentlemen," he at once addressed them, "I hope it is understood that I am delighted now as always to greet you personally

and individually, and that when your leisure and mine serves we shall often meet. I have finally consented to this interview with you as a delegation only because I have realized the difficulty of establishing convincingly through a subordinate my attitude toward all such matters." He dropped the eyeglass to the end of its ribbon, wrinkled the corner of his eyes at them in his grimace of surface amiability, and went on: "Therefore, I am happy to be able to assure you that you have been correctly instructed by my man Marcel. It is my habit to consider all proposals of any nature only through him. I may add that all such proposals made through the channel indicated will receive every consideration. Now, gentlemen, that this matter is settled, I hope you will do me the honour of accompanying me for the purpose of a little refreshment."

As though these words were the cue, the curtains at the side of the room were drawn back, disclosing the entrance to the dining room where bottles, glasses, plates of cake, and boxes of cigars could be seen.

"If you would give yourself the trouble to enter," said Mr. Kirby.

"What we really wanted to see you about," interposed Atkins before a movement in obedience could begin, "was not so much a matter of specific business as to talk to you of the community and its needs and hopes of progress."

"The general subject is fascinating," rejoined Mr. Kirby easily, "but its scope is such that I fear we shall not have leisure to examine it to-day. The word progress is susceptible of many definitions. To some it is synonymous with mere size, and to that I am not inclined to agree. Others incline toward a multiplication of industry, with its accompanying complications and expansions. That may be so in some instances, but may represent actual retrogression in others. In the strictly personal application I should view with distaste that type of progress in my own immediate surroundings. My tastes incline rather to the leisurely and æsthetic. My views, naturally, are founded on my tastes; though I acknowledge that views are always subject to modification. But tell me what refreshment appeals to your own tastes, gentlemen."

They approached the table, a little bewildered by the flow of words and by the blandly assured manner with which they were offered.

"Progress is a matter of going ahead," stated Atkins bluntly, who alone was not silenced by the diffidence of the unaccustomed. "If you don't go ahead you are going backward: you can't stand still."

Mr. Kirby turned with the singled attention peculiar to him.

"That," he replied, after his habitual pause of apparent consideration, "is very true. Remains only to know in which direction one is facing."

Atkins shook his head as though brushing aside cobwebs.

"I'm a practical man; have to be. I hate beating around the bush. Little Falls has a chance of being a second Chicago if the live men of the place work together. But every man will have to do his bit. It is well known that you are a wealthy man. We feel, as I have no doubt you do, that wealth carries obligations, and we are hoping that you will consider that we, as old established and influential citizens, are in a position to help you understand what those obligations—I will call them opportunities—are likely to be."

The Committee stirred with approval, and also with a mild surprise. No one had imagined that the ironmaster was possessed of either so much forbearance in expression or subtlety of debate.

"I find your sentiments admirable and your assumptions justified," said Mr. Kirby. "The fulfilment of my obligations of wealth is one of my most anxious concerns. As our better acquaintance progresses I think you will have little to complain of at least my conscientiousness in that particular. I appreciate fully your kindness in volunteering the good offices of your more intimate experience, and I am sure I shall find them valuable."

Columns A and B thrilled with life in the pocket of Secretary Quinn.

"Well, that's good," said Atkins. He poured himself a drink and lighted the cigar he had selected. "The thing we've got most in mind right now and that we're giving all our attention to is the matter of inducing the Stanmark Piano Company to establish its factories here. We've got a site, and transportation rates, and all those facilities pretty well in hand. It's a question now of a necessary bonus and stock subscription."

Quinn's hand strayed toward his pocket, but was arrested by Mr. Kirby's next words. The old gentleman had again mounted his eyeglass, through which he stared frostily as from behind stone walls. His voice was still courteous, but edged.

"I fear I must convict myself of stupidity," said he, "in not making myself clear. At the risk of apparent discourtesy I will again define my position. I am glad to consider any specific proposal brought to my attention through my confidential man, Marcel, who will in turn communicate my decision. I shall decline unequivocally to discuss any matters either of business, of subscription, of charity, or of donation of any kind whatsoever in my own person with anybody. Is that perfectly clear?"

He turned his keen black eyes from one to another. They, the leading men of the community, shifted in their tracks like schoolboys, unable to break through the moral dominance of the man. Only Atkins, whose heavy face had empurpled, found resistance to reply.

"It's clear," he began, "but I must say——"

He got no further. The old gentleman's imperious attitude fell from him. He bent his figure toward the table, fussing benevolently here and there among the bottles and glasses, urging a choice of drink on each, recommending the different brands of cigars. To each silent and awkward member of the Committee he offered small talk, coming to rest from his solicitous buzzing about only when each was supplied. While the refreshments were being consumed he chatted amiably and easily along. Then he insisted on conducting them on a personal tour of the grounds, dismissing them at last at the gates with a parting word of gratification that they had done him this honour.

II

Thus in an incredibly short time he managed, by sheer assumption of standard and inflexibility of decision, to establish himself in the community as a dominant but non-participating figure. This was true not only in his relations through his wealth, but also in his social activities. It was understood that old Mr. Kirby's "sorry, but it cannot be arranged" was a final negative; and no one dreamed of further urging or of going behind the refusal in search of reason or motive.

His public appearance was invariably formal. He drove; he made his stately calls. Most of the people who did not know him except by sight hated that sight fervidly. The perfection of his appanage and of his personal habiliments offended the blatant sense of democracy. He was too foreign and irritatingly su-

perior. His waxed moustache and his silly monocle and his white spats would arouse any one's honest contempt. He was too damn polite, like a French dancing master. They looked him in the eye as they passed with bitter sneers. The only difficulty was that he never seemed to be aware of them, or else that he stared them through with a cold detached insolence that was enough to make you turn anarchist, by gad!

But the significant minority, which meant everyone in Little Falls with whom he came into personal contact, fell willingly or unwillingly under the serene imposition of his own ideas, quite without reference to the ideas of others. This sometimes bore the appearance of brutal frankness; though he was not a brutally frank man.

III

The scene of his contacts with the masculine element of Little Falls was the Iroquois Club. Mr. Kirby was obviously a club man, and he almost immediately established a regular habit of sitting in the club rooms from four until six o'clock every afternoon. There he ensconced himself in a leather armchair that commanded both the street and the room, supplied himself with copies of the *London Times*, and settled himself for the enjoyment of observation. The first few days he sat alone. The men who had been introduced to him greeted him, perhaps exchanged a few perfunctory sentences, and escaped to their own cronies and amusements. They were uncertain, a little diffident, perhaps a trifle nervous as to their appearance in the eyes of this strange exotic suddenly introduced into the humdrum homely routine of club life. But this could not last. Mr. Kirby could not be ignored. He made no advances; he seemed to expect nothing; he appeared to be entirely at ease and content with his easy chair and his papers and his long slim cigar. Nevertheless, his mere presence cumulatively implied obligation of some uneasy sort. Finally Pine, a little uncertainly, asked him to make a fourth at whist. Mr. Kirby was pleased to accept.

He was found to play a very good hand at whist, and it was found that he was not nearly as formidable as had been anticipated. Often there was talk after the game. Mr. Kirby was never quite comfortable to talk to directly; he seemed to look at things in the weirdest manner, and he had such an unguessable background of experience from which to bring his conclusions.

One could not successfully argue with him. But there was a fearsome sort of enjoyment in it.

As a matter of fact Mr. Kirby was neither combative nor insistent on his own point of view. He did not argue; he merely stated, with a conviction that was devastatingly magnificent. His manner was invariably courteous; he was never arrogant; he was always thoughtful of his listeners' feelings and prejudices; he listened with attention to what even the most blatant cub had to offer; he never criticized except by indirect implication. His standard was the very lofty one of *noblesse oblige*. It is a good standard; men have gone far with it. His only limitation—if anybody had been subtle enough to do the analysis—was his view of what the obligations should be. A gentleman, in Mr. Kirby's view, should not lie, he should keep his word, he should in all circumstances keep his manners; he should never show excitement, use a loud voice, nor hurry in his movements; he should cultivate his tastes, know something of those things that appeal to the connoisseurs; he should use freely all the best things of life, whether mental or material, but he should not use them merely for display; toward servants and all in a lower walk of life he should be invariably considerate but never familiar, except as patron and patronized. That, in brief, was his philosophy in life. And his code of ethics was that a gentleman should set in perfection an example of the above; and that he should use his influence with members of his own class to foster those virtues.

All this was commendable, though sometimes disconcerting in detail when applied to this type of working society. But beneath it was a foundation of tolerant rather kindly cynicism totally inunderstandable to this eager, active, dynamic, and fundamentally optimistic people. Mr. Kirby deplored nothing: he merely accepted and classified. He was quite unresentful when motives, beneath a camouflage of disinterestedness, turned out to be selfish. Where his club mates boiled with indignation over some "dastardly betrayal" in politics or business, Mr. Kirby smiled amusedly. That is the normal state of affairs, and only to be expected. Purely noble motives undoubtedly exist—he was willing to concede that—but they had not happened to fall under his notice. Indeed, enlightened self-interest seemed to him quite an admirable mainspring for the movement of the world.

Those who listened did not venture to contradict openly, even

when the instinctive recoil of young ideal against old cynicism was most vibrant. To place oneself in opposition was to confess oneself not a "man of the world." It would have been a good deal like an open flaunting of sentiment. Only Bob Post seemed to have no shame, nor to mind being a booby.

"I can't agree with you," Bob would challenge. "Enlightened self-interest leaves out too much. It may work all right as respects a man's relations with the rest of mankind as a mass, though I'm not so sure, even as to that. But when you come down to personal human relations, a man's got to be loyal to his friends through thick and thin, or he isn't worthy of having friends. A man has friends not because of, but in spite of."

"That is the youthful idea," rejoined Mr. Kirby. "It becomes readjusted as life goes on. I think you mistake me, my young friend. It is the duty of a man to be loyal to his friends, even against his own self-interest. I have not stated the contrary. What I have meant to say, and have so badly expressed, is that one is foolish to go so far with any human being that he cannot draw back without injury. When you have gained the wisdom to appreciate the world as it is, you will say, 'So and so is fond of me, of course, and I am fond of him: we are great friends. I would do anything for him: he would do almost anything for me.'"

Mr. Kirby mounted his eyeglass and looked steadily at his flushed interlocutor.

"Note the word 'almost.' Every man has his price: it is foolish to think otherwise. Some, of course, have a low and sordid price. We need not consider them. Others—like yourself and myself, my friend—have a high price of noble coinage. I do not know what my price is—nor yours. We may never find out, for the occasion may not arise for its payment. But, for the love of God, let us not become sentimentally recriminating if the time ever does come! Let us act as sensible men who know the world."

Bob Post protested.

"You may be right," conceded Mr. Kirby, "I am sure I hope so. I give you only the results of my own observations. They have been many. I acknowledge that the show is a rather poor show, but after all I did not make it."

Bob shook his head but said no more. Nor did any of the silent bystanders venture to speak up. Nobody wanted to ap-

pear a booby; and somehow it was felt that Mr. Kirby was somewhat of an expert on boobies.

But these discussions were mentally stimulating, for they invariably stepped outside the narrower and more localized interests of the ordinary club conversations. And each felt secretly a little satisfaction over an intimacy with so cosmopolitan a character. It was vaguely felt that Mr. Kirby was a great asset before strangers.

IV

Mr. Kirby's relations with his own family were rather more curious. Fred was for the moment so deeply immersed in business and in anxious expectation of the baby that he divided his time between his office and his home, and so had no part in the Iroquois Club gatherings. As the time for Minnie's confinement drew near the life of the household concentrated more and more within itself and took less and less note of outside things. For the moment the world was in abeyance. Minnie was scientific, even in expectancy. She knew to a semicolon what the Directions for Prospective Mothers had to say; and she lived up to those directions with her usual single-minded efficiency. She went nowhere, except for her hygienic drive or her hygienic walk; she saw no one except baby-minded intimate friends, of whom the greatest was Camilla; her thoughts were as rigidly as circumstances permitted occupied with Prenatal Influences; her surroundings were modified as far as possible to present to her whatever might be presumed to enlighten the unborn Child as to the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. Camilla and Kitty remarked on her sweetly distrait Madonna-like expression, which was satisfying in that it showed the thing must be working. The more frivolous minded gave her up for the time being.

"Minnie's all baby just now," said they.

And so she was, in truth; but through the baby as a lens she at times looked out clearly on a wide vista. In the two hours of the afternoon devoted to lying still she stared up at the ceiling over her couch while her thoughts and fancies and hopes wandered far afield. They could not fail to hover about the phenomenon of old Mr. Kirby and that which made him so especially significant—his great wealth. Minnie was as little mercenary as most, but she would have been more than human if she had not reflected on the fact that Baby would be the only Kirby of its

generation, and to its hands at last by all right and precedent the Kirby millions should come. And in consequence her day-dreams of plans for education, for influence, for training, for direction took on an aspect of stately, serious grandeur, a hue of importance, that even the First-born might not have commanded by virtue of that simple estate alone. Fred, immersed in his business and his home, had obviously never thought of it, singular as that might be! Minnie hugged it to herself as a secret. She even snubbed Camilla when that damsel hinted at something of the sort.

Each Sunday afternoon the future source and present owner of all these opportunities and obligations made his formal call, paid his respects, expressed his interest, presented flowers, and departed. Minnie received him in becoming negligence. The tension she had heretofore experienced in his presence was to a great extent loosened. It was almost as if they two were mystically united for one supreme end—the bringing into the world of the Wonderful Child endowed not only with all the natural graces but with the material wealth that should set them forth before men. At times she almost addressed him in the confidential terms of a conspirator. The old gentleman saw this subtle change of manner, and shrewdly read it. He was a trifle amused, but not wholly unsympathetic. The great simplicity of first motherhood touched even his complex soul.

CHAPTER XIII

I

LEGENDARY times have passed, but fairy godmothers still gather for the bestowing of gifts; not only on princes and princesses, but on every new-made human soul that comes into this world. Many years, often, are in the fashioning of these gifts, and many lives, and the movements of races, and the clash and recoil of purposes good and evil in the great plan; so that often, and from one point of view, it seems that the whole of time has contributed to, that the entirety of history has prepared for, that the sweep of evolution has focussed upon the one morsel of humanity lying new-come in the hollow of its mother's arm. In so far she is right in her instinct: Her Son is the most precious thing on earth!

Nor can it be doubted that something besides blind chance determines where and how and with what endowment this new soul should come into being. The germination of a thing that is to go on eternally, is not unimportant to the cosmos, to be viewed with indifference by whatever Intelligences are concerned with humanity. There must be laws that govern the deflection of a portion of the Stream of Life into the container which shall make it for ever individual, laws of the attraction of likes or opposites, laws of affinity, laws of struggle and stress: laws which are immutable, but which may be manipulated—as any laws may be manipulated—toward desired results. The fairy godmothers—the Intelligences concerned with humanity, may still as of old bring their gifts, but now before the physical birth may collect and strengthen the forces of life that are to surround and model the new soul; may even select the cradle of its conception. And the reward will be that at the long last, through its own struggles, its own reactions, its own personal aspiration which none other can awaken and carry on, another individual force will be added to the Purpose for which the Intelligences stand. And as in the fairy tales, the gift-bearers are both evil and good.

Certainly in the instance before us the gifts ready for the little Kirby's tiny hands were many and varied. Here were health and vitality; steadfastness and eager ambition; good taste and love of the beautiful; immense wealth and an old-world culture; social position and a present though passing age of simplicity. These forces, and many more, were pressing and present, embodied in a number of people whose interest in the newcomer was rather more than usually centred and active. Each for his own reasons wished ardently to see his own interpretation of life mirrored in this boy. Just at the moment it seemed to each of them that in a way it was for this culmination that each of them had lived. Destinies focussed on the new soul.

II

The great event happened in November. It was a boy. Fred at last ceased being a prowling and pathetic nuisance filled with carefully inhibited terror, and turned into a blatant and cigar-offering nuisance instead. To his astonishment the life of Little Falls seemed to have flowed right on over this terrific affair without showing a ripple. People he met were glad the Kirbys had a baby, but they were not overwhelmed. Indeed, after accepting the cigar and expressing pleasure that Mrs. Kirby was doing so well, they went right on and talked about something else! One man laughed at Fred's expression and informed him that such things had happened before!

Cousin Jim seemed to be the only human being who had any sense. While the ordeal was going on he sat with Fred, and smoked his pipe, and did not blab; and when it was over, he made his congratulations and got out and gave Fred room to expand. Then when Fred, returning, just a tiny bit dashed, but still exuberant, steamed up the hill long before his usual time, Cousin Jim met him at the corner and bore him company as far as the door.

"I've seen him," quoth Cousin Jim, "and in my judgment he's a fine young human animal. You're going to have a peck of fun raising that youngster, Fred."

After which he retired from the opening he had made and let Fred rave.

The young mother had gained strength since her husband had last seen her; indeed, looked almost her usual self. The baby was with her in bed. She raised one corner of the filmy covering

to permit Fred a glimpse of his tiny face. Fred started to whisper, but Miss Maxworth, the nurse, laughed at him.

"Bless you, he won't wake, sir," she assured him, "not unless he gets hungry."

Fred was much struck by this trait of concentration on the essentials of life. He was almost inclined to consider it as creditably unique to this extraordinary infant.

The room was already abloom with flowers sent in by friends. Fred noted the fact in general, and in particular a vaseful that stood on the small table near the bed. His differentiations in cut flowers consisted of roses, daisies, chrysanthemums, "pinks," and "other flowers." These fell under none of those categories. They were obviously not even "other flowers."

"What in thunder do you call those things? and where did they come from?" he demanded.

"Aren't they wonderful?" replied Minnie. "Uncle left them. He came himself to leave them and inquire."

"What are they?"

"Do you mean to say you don't know orchids when you see them?"

"So those things are orchids!" commented Fred, examining them interestedly. "They look kind of queer to me."

"They are wonderful!" Minnie cried warmly, "so delicate and exotic! like tropical butterflies."

"Well, I don't think they're in it with American Beauties," decided Fred with conviction. "I never saw anything like them around here."

"They must have come from the city," agreed Minnie to this.

Fred's momentary interest, on the last flicker, warmed up again. Here was a practical aspect.

"He couldn't have got 'em here from the city since morning," he pointed out. "He must be a darn good guesser."

But here the nurse, who had been bursting with suppressed knowledge, could no longer contain herself.

"There's been a box of them in every day for the last three days," she informed them: then to their look of astonishment, "Mr. Maxworth," she went on, naming the local florist, "is my first cousin, and he told me he had a daily order for them until the baby came. I suppose I ought not to tell you that."

"Good Heavens!" cried Minnie, stirred to the point of scandal, and rising on her elbow to look again at the display.

"Well, what's the excitement?" demanded Fred. "I think that was a pretty good idea."

"Fred Kirby, do you realize what orchids are worth?"

"No, why should I? I suppose they are expensive at this time of year, of course. Why, you have to pay eight dollars a dozen for roses."

"Those things," stated Minnie in patient tones, "are worth at the very least ten dollars, maybe more."

"Well," returned Fred equably, "he didn't beat Freeman's roses out much at that. There's only about two dozen of them."

"Not ten dollars a dozen: ten dollars *apiece*," stated Minnie. She was impressed, not so much by the money involved as by the splendid magnificence of the gesture that would duplicate such an order day after day merely that when the moment came the offering should be fresh.

Fred said nothing. He stared at the orchids, and a queer set look drew down the corners of his mouth. So long did he stare that finally Minnie asked him with a little laugh what he was about.

"Counting them," he replied briefly; and left the room.

He descended the stairs to his den, whirled a light chair to the desk, and sat down. From his vest pocket he produced a small leather case. He snapped this open, gazed at its contents, snapped it shut, and returned it to his pocket. For a moment he wrote, then rose, carrying in his hand a strip of paper. The grim look at the corners of his mouth deepened.

Outside the bedroom door he paused a moment before entering.

"Here," he said, laying the slip on the counterpane, "I've been figuring all day on your birthday present—yours and the boy's, I mean. I'm no good at these things. It isn't just money; but you know better what you want."

She glanced at the slip and then up at him, awed.

"Why, Fred!" she cried. "Why—why, Fred! You mustn't—you can't afford——"

"That's all right"—he stopped her gruffly—"this sort of thing happens only once, you know. Got to celebrate."

Her eyes were filled with tears. Perhaps some dim instinct within her rose to meet the instinct in Fred, an instinct so blind that he did not understand it himself; a sudden alarmed rising of defence, in the only way he knew, against the vague future menace of the calm overriding power of great wealth. She held out her

arms to him. The strip of paper fell to the floor. As he stooped to her kiss, Miss Maxworth retrieved the strip to place it on the table, and—oh, accidentally, of course—glanced at it. It was a check for ten thousand dollars.

III

Matters went on smoothly during the three weeks Minnie allowed herself in bed. For the first time in years she had almost complete leisure to think. A situation existed. In the movement and stress of everyday life neither she, nor Fred, nor anybody else concerned would ever have faced it squarely or examined it clearly, unless forced to do so by outward circumstances; but in this enforced idleness she fronted it deliberately. It was self-evident that Uncle Zeke had wealth; that Uncle Zeke was an old man; that Uncle Zeke's family, as far as known, was a small one. Some one, or all, of that family would eventually, in all probability, fall heir to the wealth.

That was the situation. But "delicacy of feeling" dictated a sort of elaborate ignoring of it. The mention in polite society of vulgar money was supposed to send a shiver through all your refinement: knowledge of an expected inheritance, no matter how natural the expectation, was to be concealed like nakedness. This was custom; not hypocrisy—same sort of shudder that would be caused by such words as "stink" or "guts." Minnie, however, with a clear brain, courage, a restless urge, and, for the once, time to think things out, laid hold of the matter without false shame. Money, to her—or anybody else—was a supremely desirable thing. She could use the Kirby millions: she wasted no time over that thought. Only a fleeting vision she permitted herself of the expansion of life that would go with them, then moved forward to the immediate practical aspect. In all probability the bulk of that fortune would come to the Fred Kirbys, especially since now the succession was assured. But, while extremely probable, that disposal had not the dead certainty warranted by its importance. There were numerous other possibilities. Old Mr. Kirby was a mystery. No one could know, for example, what connections he might have made during his life; nor indeed what ideas he might have as to successions, even were there no domestic or sentimental entanglements. How about a heavily endowed Kirby Foundation, for example?

It certainly would not be safe to sit down and wait for the

money to drop into your lap. Uncle must be brought to appreciate that he was the head of a House. A little sane management, Minnie told herself.

And she told herself the additional one thing necessary to place in her hand the weapon of direct ruthlessness that is, in such a connection, so truly feminine. She told herself—and believed it—that in this she had no thought whatever for herself, that she was thinking only of her boy. Which rounded the affair neatly into line with such highly moral institutions as mother-love, sacrifice of one's own finer feelings for the sake of a higher cause, and so on as far as you please. It is extremely comfortable, when you want to do anything, to get yourself squarely justified by some worthy outside motive. It leaves your hands free for all sorts of things you would not do for yourself alone.

The glow of this thought gave Minnie resolution for what she considered a first essential step. Her intuitions were good; and her brain keen at working them over. The basic reason for that ten-thousand-dollar check was almost immediately clear to her, though Fred himself could not have analyzed his reactions. Fred was going to be difficult. He was stubborn and independent, and he had a queer blind jealousy of things near to him, which he did not recognize as jealousy, but which threw him into an instinctive unreasoning opposition to them. She foresaw rather a constantly recurring series of little troubles, than any big clash. There would be a lot to smooth over; a succession of small obstructions, objections, resentments of what he would call interference. Ninety-nine times it would be an affair of alert tact and feminine diplomacy: the hundredth she would simply have to override. She narrowed her eyes envisaging that, setting her teeth, summoning all her combative power in anticipation. It would be disagreeable—it would be dreadful—dear old stupid Fred—he would never understand. Then she relaxed with a little laugh and some thought about crossing bridges when one got to them. /

IV

Minnie waited until she had regained her strength before joining battle over what she had decided. She was determined; she had the strength of her ultimate intent; she won.

Fred, returning from the office, always made a bee line for his son, to whom he offered a forefinger. It was a matter of brag-

gadocio and pride that the infant always clasped it firmly; as every other domestic infant, human or canine, grasps firmly almost everything thrust within its extremely limited radius of attention. Fred, however, considered it a mark of advanced athletic intelligence.

"Hullo, Frederick Junior!" he would roar jovially. "Missed your Dad to-day?"

This by dint of repetition had come to be a formula.

On the day when Minnie considered her strength arrayed, down to the last button, she challenged.

"Why do you always call him that?" she asked.

"Call him what?" demanded Fred, looking up, puzzled.

"Frederick Junior."

"Why, that's his name, isn't it?" said Fred.

"I want to talk to you about that," said Minnie.

The mere victory was comparatively easy. Fred did not put up much of a fight. He was more puzzled and hurt than anything else; but as he had not been required often to yield, his combative instinct was not yet strong. Minnie said nothing of the money. She put the matter on family grounds. Uncle Ezekiel was the head of the House. It was not much of an argument intrinsically, but Minnie put some very pretty clothes on it. She also managed to look just a little wan and pathetic; and to convey subtly the idea that a mother, having borne all the pains, had in justice the right to decisions. It was done very skilfully, and it got its result without fireworks. Fred acquiesced, baffled and silenced. It looked selfish in him to insist on anything so personal to himself as his own name. A base fleeting thought that the money might have something to do with it touched the outskirts of his mind; he ejected it indignantly. But though he agreed, there was left in the bottom of his mind a silt of resentment which required only enough similar deposits to rise above the surface.

By the next mail went forth to hundreds of addresses Fred's and Minnie's calling cards. Attached to them, and fastening all three together by a white ribbon, was a miniature card reading:

Ezekiel Kirby 2d

These had been secretly prepared under Freeman's direction, and addressed by Minnie and Camilla. All stamped and ready they had awaited only the outcome of the Fred-skirmish. It was

Freeman's idea. He had fresh knowledge of social forms, and the trick was a new one to Little Falls. It was a knockout: especially that "second." You might know that Minnie would have something up her sleeve!

Strangely enough it tickled Fred hugely. The miniature size of that tiny card, so exactly like his own except for dimension, affected him much as did the baby's small fist beside his huge paw. He took one of them to the office and laid it in the right-hand top drawer of his desk with a curious collection of sentimental souvenirs whose significance except as junk would have been apparent to no one but Fred.

CHAPTER XIV

I

OLD MR. KIRBY lived his life and watched all these affairs without outside comment. He was, for the moment, marking time.

"I have been honoured to-day, Marcel," he informed his factotum. He indicated the announcement cards lying on the small table at his hand. "My name is to be perpetuated in the Kirby family."

"That is very gratifying, monsieur."

"Very," said Mr. Kirby, drily. "It is also illuminating. It has occurred to me that were my worldly condition such that my dispositions were not an object of solicitude, this honour might not have been accorded me."

Marcel permitted himself a discreet smile.

"The attention is gratifying," pursued the old man. "It indicates a knowledge of the situation and a desire to propitiate it. That desire must not lapse because of certainty."

"I perceive that Monsieur has a disposal to make," said Marcel.

The old gentleman sat erect and dropped his negligent indirection.

"You must in your own way convey to Madame the feeling that this infant is not necessarily my heir; that I am in two minds."

"It shall be done, monsieur."

"Just a hint, a suspicion, a disquieting uncertainty," said Mr. Kirby, sitting back. "That will be sufficient."

He remained for some time gazing into the flickering fire. More than he would acknowledge to himself, his long dormant family instincts had been aroused by this advent. With something as near emotion as he had known for years he had begun to harbour a desire; the ambition to mould this new being to his own hard-won standards of worthiness, to give it freely in tenderest years those essential things which he himself had missed or acquired painfully.

II

Marcel lost no time. He provided himself with flowers from the garden, one of Mr. Kirby's cards, and with them as an excuse presented himself at the house on the Hill. Minnie heard his voice and came to the door of the hallway.

"This is very kind of Mr. Kirby, Marcel," she said gracefully, "and very kind of you." She smiled, "I am sure my young man will appreciate it also."

"Of that I am most certain, madame," rejoined Marcel, discreetly entering her mood, "for even at an age so tender he must show the taste inherited from his so-charming mother and his great-uncle."

"You have never seen him, have you?" queried Minnie. "Would you like to?"

"That would be indeed an honour for me—and a pleasure," bowed Marcel.

He stood over the dainty cradle for several moments, gazing down on the pink and blinking little creature offered for his inspection. Then he apparently aroused himself with a sigh.

"It is a fine infant—of a fineness," he said; "there should be no occasion for fear."

"Fear?" repeated Minnie. "What do you mean by that?"

Marcel's polished surface broke in a slight confusion.

"Nothing, madame, I misspoke. It was a chance remark."

But he said it in a manner yet more to arouse Minnie's curiosity.

"Nonsense, Marcel, you must have meant something. You must tell me."

Marcel looked to right and left, shrugged his shoulders slightly, and threw out his hands.

"It was a stray thought of my own. Madame is a woman of the world—she will understand, and she will not think that I presume to criticize when I say that Monsieur Kirby, great gentleman as he is, is also an old man with some whims of age."

Minnie laughed.

"We all have our whims," said she.

"It is of course evident that the natural succession of the *Maison Kirby* lies here." He indicated the cradle. "That tells itself. But, madame—I would not presume——"

"Go ahead," Minnie gave him permission, "I do not believe you are one to gossip idly."

"In that Madame does me no more than justice!" cried Marcel. "For so many years that almost I have lost the track of them I have been the right hand of Monsieur Kirby, his eyes—yes, sometimes when he would spare himself fatigue, his very brains! Thus I may say I know Monsieur Kirby's very thoughts."

"But what has this to do with the subject?" asked Minnie, who was getting a little impatient at so much circumlocution. Minnie was shrewd and had a very clear mind. She saw that Marcel had something definite he wished to impart, and she suspected that he had come for the purpose. Marcel in turn saw that she understood. It was only necessary to maintain a thin veil of convention. "In two words, what is it?" she asked.

"In two words, one of the idiosyncrasies of Monsieur crossed my mind," said Marcel. "Monsieur has great pride of race, an admirable thing. Perhaps he carries it to an extreme in this: that he would prefer that his race end with himself rather than go on unworthily."

"I sympathize with him," said Minnie, but with a heightened colour. "Possibly many of us are in the same frame of mind. But unfortunately we are not permitted to make away with those of our relatives who do not please us."

Marcel laughed deprecatingly.

"I think Monsieur Kirby's idea would be rather to remove himself," he submitted. "He has heretofore found the world wide. That was all of my harmless remark, madame. The child is a beautiful child; he has a fine brow, a well-shaped head. Even in infants so young one can distinguish. It was stupid of me to have spoken aloud, but I was rejoiced at the conviction that came over me, madame, that this child will most certainly fulfil Mr. Kirby's expectations—and hopes! If at his advanced age he should be disappointed, I think, madame, it would break his heart. And yet I know—I, Marcel, who have been close to him many years—that his nobility of soul is such that at no cost to himself would he swerve from his duty."

Marcel departed shortly on that. Minnie had no clear recollection of all this rigmarole of words, but the purport was to her plain enough. She was somewhat indignant at this cool appraisal; yet what she hastily labelled her sense of justice pointed out to her that after all it was only natural and reasonable.

What did old Mr. Kirby know about them? They might have proved to be absolutely impossible! She told herself that by now he must surely realize that they were of the same race; but an uneasy doubt stirred in her. It was not a doubt of herself, but of the old gentleman's standards. What did he expect? What did he demand?

III

Fred, returning late from business, got the first reflex. Suddenly he discovered that raising this child was going to be a very serious occupation for everybody. Fred had entertained rather vague ideas as to the raising of children. He knew that it had been done before, was being done right now, occasionally on somewhat of a wholesale scale, and apparently without either absorbing all of grown-up time or attention, or even demanding any particular financial affluence. When they were babies you fed them milk and changed their diapers and took them out in a baby carriage. When they grew a little older you bought them copper-toed shoes and corduroy breeches and sent them to school and romped with them at home. In Fred's observation it was not an expensive pastime. Quite a number of small-salaried men he knew had three or four and were still solvent.

These primitive ideas he proffered diffidently in comment on the astoundingly elaborate programme Minnie outlined. He had heard nothing of all this. As a matter of fact, a great deal of it Minnie's rapid brain had evolved since Marcel's visit had opened out before her an expanding vista. Indeed, if Minnie had grown into these ideas more gradually she would not have dumped them all on Fred at once. That was poor diplomacy.

"Of course, the Caspar Matthews have four children—that is self-evident," Minnie countered Fred's feeble remark. "But we're hardly in their class. You hardly expect me to do my own work, I suppose?"

"Well, I hardly think that is necessary," grinned Fred.

"Then we've got to have a nurse."

"We've got one, haven't we?"

"We have an ignorant Irish girl. But she knows nothing about the real care of children: and her grammar is something dreadful."

Fred tried to be facetious as to little Ezekiel's tender susceptibilities as to the English language.

"The whole trend of a child's cultivation in the use of the English language is determined by what it hears habitually in its very earliest years," stated Minnie, "yes, even before it begins actually to understand, certain accents and forms of speech sink into its subconscious. I can't break you of saying 'he don't' or 'it don't' instead of 'doesn't' to this day."

"I do not!"

"You do! And you do it because someone when you were a very little boy used it, and you got accustomed to the sound of it, so it doesn't offend your ear now. No: we must get rid of Katie and get hold of a good competent woman with some education and training."

"Well, go ahead," agreed Fred.

"I want to speak to you about it because it's going to be expensive, and I believe it's better to know squarely where we stand."

"Of course," Fred approved what he looked upon as Minnie's commonsense in regard to financial matters, but which was in reality only Minnie's commonsense in regard to Fred, "but I guess we can stand a jump in wages, whatever they are."

"It isn't so much the wages, as the house alterations."

"The house alterations!" cried Fred, stunned.

"Of course. Now, really, Fred, you can't expect a woman of any refinement to be contented with ordinary servants' quarters, can you?"

"No, by jingo, I can't!" agreed Fred, waking up. This was something that interested him. "I shouldn't expect any human being, refined or otherwise, to be contented to live in those miserable little dark cold cubby holes that you couldn't swing a cat in."

"They are quite good enough for that class of people," Minnie interrupted coldly, "and they don't expect anything else. You exaggerate, as you always do. But we must build a decent bedroom for the nurse opening off from the nursery; and there'd better be a separate bathroom for the two rooms."

"There's a bathroom already."

Minnie stirred impatiently.

"Really, Fred, you don't think we are going on using the guest room indefinitely as a nursery, do you?" Fred grumbled something.

"Of course," said Minnie, "we can do it if it is necessary;

that is, if we can't afford it. I can do my own work, if I must."

"But other people have children without all this fuss."

"Yes, and they grow up haphazard. I'm tired of hearing the old-fashioned people talk. *They* never bothered with diet, just let them eat at table with the family; *they* didn't worry about colds, all children had colds in winter time—faugh! And out of the huge families they brought into the world how many lived even ten years? Do you know anything about the statistics of infant mortality?"

"Not a thing."

"Well! And look at the way the average child is brought up. They run wild, just wild! Look at those Prentiss children. Do you want Baby to be like them?"

"I certainly do not!" cried Fred.

"Well!" concluded Minnie triumphantly.

"I guess you're right," agreed Fred after a moment of silence, "I hadn't thought about those things. I tell you what you do: you make out a list. The business is growing so fast and so much of its earnings have to go back as capital that I have to figure pretty close. But I can arrange it if I know just how much is expected. You make out a list. Get everything in—baby clothes and all—as far as you can." He grinned slowly. "We'll have a Baby Budget," said he.

IV

He found his Baby Budget on his desk at the office some days later. He looked at the total and whistled ruefully. Then he examined the items and his face broke into a grin of admiration. Mighty few women, by George, could have gone into the subject so thoroughly. Minnie certainly was a good mother—one in a thousand! It was up to him to give her the tools with which to work.

After all it was just a matter of slowing up a bit on his business expansion. Fred's business, as it stood, produced quite a tidy income. The only reason he had for feeling a present stringency was because he had certain ambitions which absorbed as much as he could conscientiously call his surplus. Why should he hasten his ambition at the expense of his home, anyway?

Fred's ambition could be very simply stated. From the vantage point of a town office he conducted what were in effect two separate industries. Up river stood a factory that made wooden

things out of the hardwood with which the western part of the state was still well grown; down river, at the head of navigation, stood another factory that made metal things out of the ore brought in by barges direct from the mines. Both the wooden things and the metal things were such as are used in everyday households. It was Fred's thought that some day his two factories might make all the items of ordinary house furnishing, so that he would be able to advertise to the whole country that for certain fixed sums any young couple could be assured that everything necessary to housekeeping, from the kitchen stove to nutmeg graters, from bedsteads to door stops would be delivered at the door by Kirby & Son. He never told of this thought, but it was constantly before him—Class A, Class B, Class C, down to Class Z, if need be—all differing in price, quantity, and quality, but not in essential completeness; and under each class a choice of styles and types. Order by mail: you know where you stand.

In the meantime he made bed-room and dining-room furniture with one hand, and stoves with the other. He was now making a great many of each. His turnover was considerable.

CHAPTER XV

I

ABOUT this time Freeman suffered a severe shock. It was definitely all off with Mattie Walker, and Freeman was left with the delicate task of implying that he was not thrown over and at the same time preserving a reputation for chivalry.

The fact of the matter is that Mattie's lively temperament got tired of him. She had exhausted the novelty. The fascination of dark, languid good looks, of bored depreciations, of exquisite delicacies of taste, of punctilious courtesies, and hot-house refinements had worn thin. Mattie experienced a reaction in favour of the Rough and Rude; and as this mood synchronized with the advent in town of a breezy, slangy, beefy, and vital youth who tried to kiss her within two hours of their first acquaintance, Freeman from that moment had not a show in the world.

But Freeman sensed it coming almost before it was on the way. His intuitions were very keen when his self-esteem was in question. And he took to cover while there was yet time. Freeman was no scrapper. He would crush rivalry, should occasion arise, but only as one crushes the humble and non-combative worm. When a struggle seemed likely, Freeman much preferred to retire. And in the present case he realized he must work fast. The flood was impending; the avalanche quivered; the storm swooped; the red-faced chump who, it seems, had graduated from the State University, was on his way. No leisure for the gradual and graceful withdrawal that would have satisfied Freeman's artistic sense.

He sought opportunity for a private quarrel—not a difficult matter with one who had so long been spoiled as the Reigning Belle; he immediately appeared at the Country Club dance with Celia Atterbury whom he rushed desperately; he danced once with Mattie, and when the music ceased he led her to her seat,

bowed formally and departed. Then when in the face of the aroused public Mattie threw herself into a wild flirtation with the Red-faced Chump it sufficiently appeared that she was doing so to pique Freeman. The latter thus stepped aside from the flood; avoided the avalanche; sheltered from the storm. It was rather neat. Another day and it would have been too late! He paid diminishing attention to Celia for a week or so, just to fulfil the artistic demands of the situation. At the end of that time he would have gained the approbation of George Washington in one respect—he was free from all entangling alliances.

II

Freeman now led a fat and prosperous existence that just suited him. For some time his initial flyer into the blue skies of high finance quite satisfied him. But shortly he realized that if dreams were to come true—of a Japanese servant, for instance—he must see some way clear to more money than the bank paid him. He had now graduated to what was by courtesy named Third Assistant Cashier, which meant that he no longer had to run errands outside the bank. A slight increase of salary went with this. Mr. Pine, when approached on the subject of a further raise, proved singularly obtuse.

"You'll get more salary in time," said he, "when you get to the point of promotion again."

"What are the chances of promotion?" asked Freeman.

"Pretty good; pretty good," replied Pine heartily. "Industry, industry, my boy, that's the road to success!"

That day, instead of lunching at the Iroquois Club as was his habit, Freeman went across to Larry's place. Among the regular noon habitués was Sam Brady, for whom a special seat at one of the five outside tables was always reserved. Freeman moved a chair to insert himself between Sam and his neighbour and called for lunch. He wasted little time in preliminary.

"Look here, Sam," said he, "I've got a little more money to invest. What do you think is a good thing to buy right now? You keep track of those things more than I do."

Sam glanced at him with a trace of amusement in his hard eyes, but did not reply for some moments.

"No," said he at length, "I'm not going to sling any more advice. What you want is to go to a brokerage firm and establish a business connection in a regular way. Then you can use your

judgment based on something beside outside tips and guesses; you can get the *dope*."

The phrase "business connection" appealed to Freeman. He lost the internal hang-dogginess with which he had approached this matter.

"That's exactly what I want," he rejoined, "I'm so tied up in my regular position that I can't attend to any outside business satisfactorily. I meant this as a business proposition."

"Out of my line," said Sam briefly. "Here"—he produced a gold pencil and a card and scribbled on it a moment—"here's just the fellow for you. Go see him and tell him I sent you."

"Thanks," said Freeman gratefully, "I will." He glanced at the name on the card. It was that of the Red-faced Chump!

III

The Red-faced Chump, whose name was Canby, proved to have taken offices on the second floor of the Atkins Building. The two rooms were not very large, but they were exceedingly affluent in appearance. Instead of the coco matting or linoleum or just plain paint that was then the usual covering of an office floor, these offered to the tread thick soft rugs. Easy chairs of leather, a couch and a shaded lamp further relieved the sordid commercial atmosphere. Canby was seated behind a bare flat-topped desk covered with glass which held only a blotter, a bronze ash tray, a dull-finished mahogany letter tray, pen and ink, and a perhaps-ivory push button. The atmosphere was quiet and leisurely and very, very rich.

Freeman did not immediately penetrate beyond the outer office. One of the girls took Sam's card of introduction and disappeared within. After a moment she returned.

"Mr. Canby will see you in just a moment," said she, and resumed her typewriter.

At the end of the aforesaid moment a buzzer sounded sharply. The girl nodded to Freeman. He pushed open the door and entered.

Canby was alone, but a second door, leading into the hall, might possibly account for the departure of a previous visitor—or might not.

Freeman was proffered a leather chair and a cigarette. Canby himself lighted up and leaned back with an air that implied he had all the leisure in the world for this especial visitor.

Freeman explained. He conveyed the idea that he had a little money to invest; that it was a very small amount only because it was a surplus.

Canby proved unexpectedly quick on the uptake. He knew just Freeman's position and just how he felt about it. Of course, there wouldn't be much in it for either of them, that was understood; but that needn't bother Freeman—he was glad to do it for any friend of Sam's; and, in any case, Freeman—or any of his friends—were in a little different position from the ordinary run of customers.

"I'll consider the matter and let you hear from me to-morrow," said he. "I know that a man in your position is pretty well occupied with his responsibilities in the bank, and I shall be glad to help you as far as I can."

"Better come up this evening to my little place," urged Freeman impulsively. "It's of course difficult for me to get away during office hours; and I can give you a drink and a smoke."

"Well, I will," agreed Canby, after a moment's hesitation.

The thought of Mattie Walker flashed across both their minds.

"I think I can," continued Canby hastily, "but if not, you'll hear from me to-morrow."

CHAPTER XVI

I

THUS things went along for the two years old Mr. Kirby had in mind to permit to elapse before his personal intervention. The child came to no harm. He was a perfectly good little animal, and had undoubtedly escaped a certain number of usual physical ailments. For six or eight months Minnie had been completely absorbed in the job of scientific motherhood. By the end of that time she had exhausted the intellectual interest of the how and wherefore; it had reached the point of mechanical repetition. Minnie found that even motherhood, wonderful as it was, did not contain the whole secret of existence. Her maternal affection was almost fiercely passionate; but her clear brain showed her very plainly that if she were not to relapse into the too-common type of cow-mother detailing the anecdotes of its young, she must arrange her life. After a search and trial she had found a very competent trustworthy woman, many degrees above the nurse-girl status, both in capacity and in price. Minnie began to tear herself away from the adorable infant.

On little Ezekiel's second birthday Mr. Kirby made one of his formidable calls. He arrived early in the afternoon with his usual appanage of shining horses, clanking chains, rigid men on the box, and exquisitely appointed brougham. Mr. Kirby was the only one in town who never exchanged wheels for runners, no matter how snowy the weather. He entered the parlour and took his seat erectly on a straight-backed chair from which he instantly arose when Minnie swept into the room.

"You are just on time," she said brightly. "The young man is awake. Won't you come up to the nursery and congratulate him?"

"Presently, my dear, presently," rejoined Mr. Kirby, "I should like the pleasure of a little chat with you first, if you will be so kind."

Minnie fluttered to a seat, an excitement growing within her

which she tried to conceal. The keen black eyes were examining her steadily and appraisingly. To her exasperation she found it difficult to sustain their gaze.

"We are both concerned with the future of the boy," he began after a moment, "and our interest, I flatter myself, is not far from equal. Since that is so, it has occurred to me that the time has come to consult of ways and means."

He bored her with his bright stare until she murmured something in response.

"Our interest differs in kind but not in degree," he continued. "You have the natural maternal desire to produce in him as worthy an individual as possible, combined with an anxiety to arrange matters to his best possible material advantage."

The words fell precisely, deliberately, as though each was chosen after consideration. Minnie shifted with a faint uneasiness. The last phrase: how much did that imply?

"I on my side am interested in him as the youngest generation of the Kirbys; and as a possible heir to myself—should he turn out worthy to be so named. That is, of course, the hope of both of us."

"Oh," cried Minnie from out of the shame-faced money-convention of the time, "I should never give that part of it a thought, of course."

The old gentleman tapped the floor testily with his cane.

"I pay you the compliment of treating you as a sensible human being!" he cried with as near an approach to impatience as he ever permitted himself. "Of course you hope for my money! You named the boy after me, did you not?"

Minnie gasped as though she had been struck a physical blow, as though a garment had been torn from her, exposing nakedness.

"Oh!" she cried, "how can you be so unkind! How can you impute to me such motives!"

She was on the point of tears at the unexpectedness of what she considered an attack; but the old gentleman remained quite unmoved.

"Of course you named him for me in hope of my money," he rejoined, "why not? Don't be absurd!"

"You are the head of the family—I thought it only right——" babbled Minnie.

"Ezekiel," pronounced that gentleman, "is one of the ugliest names I know. There are other members of the family, closer

in tie, whose names are more musical—James, or Frederick, for example. The thing sees itself. Why should you pretend to me? You delay our discussion.” He mounted his eyeglass and looked at her steadily.

Minnie felt as though she were dropping through immense space. She had no defence available against this outrageous attack. It was indecent! She tried to gather a portion of her dignity.

“If you have come here to insult me——” she began coldly.

“I have not come here to insult you,” interposed Mr. Kirby. “I have come here to discuss with you certain practical matters. I have merely pointed out to you that we have a common interest and a common aim, and have mentioned the common ground on which we stand. I have, as I said, paid you the compliment of assuming your intelligence. I should not have ventured to speak so frankly to your husband, for he has his ineradicable provincial prejudices, but it had seemed to me that you were a woman of the world.”

He made as though to rise, but Minnie extended a restraining hand. Her mind was keen, her resiliency that of a truly vital being. She got hold of herself with an effort, though spots of high colour burned in her cheeks.

“Go on,” she said briefly.

“Ah, that is better!” approved the old gentleman, letting the monocle fall to the end of its ribbon. “To resume: we have a common aim. I desire my fortune to go to this boy; you desire my fortune to go to this boy. There remains only to discuss in a practical and sensible manner how best to attain that end.”

“I don’t quite understand,” ventured Minnie.

“From my point of view,” said Mr. Kirby, “it is necessary that my heir should be worthy of his inheritance. I am quite fixed on that point. I consider that the control of great wealth is justified only by the possession of appropriate cultivation. If you will pardon my saying so, the contrary spectacle is too often presented in this country. I have no intention, no intention whatever, of adding to the sum total of such *grotesqueries*. My heir, if so be it I decide on a personal heir, must be a cultivated gentleman in the best sense of that abused word.”

“I think,” Minnie could not restrain herself from saying, “that you are unjustified in implying that my son could be otherwise.”

Mr. Kirby surveyed her amusedly.

"Within the limitations of the education usual to his environment, of course, my dear," he conceded in more friendly tones. "You must not be offended with an old man who has spent much of his time in older civilizations if he finds the usual and unassisted opportunities in a place such as this a trifle lacking, even a trifle crude. Come, my dear, as a sensible woman; even your local patriotism would hardly contend that Little Falls possesses all the advantages of Paris, for example."

Minnie's freakishly leaping mind unexpectedly visualized for her the last painstakingly intellectual gathering at the Woman's Club, and she laughed aloud.

"That's better! that's better!" approved the old gentleman. "You see? You and I, my dear, must conspire together to make up to my little grand-nephew for the lacks of his environment. We can do it, you and I. The Kirbys are a good stock, none better. It needs but the opportunities, the education. Now that we understand each other, we can consult together how best to supply them, is it not so?"

"I shall be very glad of suggestions from your experience," said Minnie. She had recovered her poise—had definitely planted her feet on the new ground.

"The languages are of course essential," prescribed Mr. Kirby; "a knowledge of and feeling for music, the arts; a certain polish that can come only with foreign travel or residence. The moralities of manners, naturally, may be safely entrusted to yourself. For the present most of the other things can wait. But in my experience a feeling for the beautiful cannot be too early inculcated; and a speaking facility in the languages is never better gained than in earliest childhood."

"I agree fully," said Minnie.

"Very well, then. Since that is so, you will not I am sure take it amiss if I offer one or two suggestions; they must not be taken as implying any criticism of yourself or of your grasp of the situation. For example, one cannot learn languages from books; one cannot learn languages from teachers of one's own race. One must learn by actual personal contact with natives of the country, so that not only forms but subtleties of accent become second nature."

"You are perfectly right," agreed Minnie, "but how can one do that in Little Falls?"

"One cannot. For that reason I consider it essential—absolutely essential"—he paused and fixed her with his gaze for a moment, and then went on—"that a thoroughly competent Frenchwoman be engaged as nursery governess. I consider French as the basic language, one that the cultivated gentleman should speak as he speaks his native tongue. It will be necessary," enunciated Mr. Kirby, raising his hand as Minnie started to speak, "to exercise great discretion in the selection of this woman. There is a vast difference in the purity of accent in different parts of France. Even a frankly American accent is preferable to the Breton or Norman or some parts of the south of France. A native of Touraine would be the best."

"I would not have the slightest idea of where to find such a woman," said Minnie.

"You will allow me to arrange that," old Mr. Kirby stated.

Minnie hesitated a moment, then spoke her thought. She had by now quite entered into the spirit of the thing. After all, wasn't this frank way of facing facts the best? There was a lot of false shame about our people: they did such things better abroad. Minnie never lacked speed once she had grasped an idea.

"The only thing I am a little doubtful about," she said, "is whether Fred can afford it."

An hour before, Minnie would have died before she would have admitted that so mercenary a consideration as affording a thing ever deflected her serene progressions. Now she said it easily, boldly, in a matter-of-fact manner just as if not affording things were as respectable a subject to talk about as Emerson's Essays.

"That must not interfere," stated Mr. Kirby. "I shall insist that it is my right at least to assist in defraying the expenses of my grand-nephew's training. That, we are agreed, is as much to my interest as to yours."

Minnie opened her mouth to demur; realized instantly that the objection would be conventional and out of key with the new sophisticated worldliness she had adopted; and nodded her head.

"You must be my executive," said the old man, rising. "I do not mind telling you, my dear, that I am pleased to find that I was not mistaken in assuming you to be a woman of intelligence."

He arose. Minnie did not offer to accompany him to the door as she would have done with any of her friends. She guessed that in Mr. Kirby's eyes for a woman to do this with a man would seem a crude informality. Better to let him struggle

into his overcoat unassisted. Of course, the proper thing would be to ring for a servant to show him out; but while Minnie was a good gambler, she knew better than to take a chance on Martha, the present incumbent. Martha would come to the ring, all right; but first she would go to the front door, all signals or muffled oaths to the contrary notwithstanding; and then, when she found that to be a false scent, her poor intellects would scatter. "Show Mr. Kirby out," would have scant if any meaning to her. If she did anything other than a goggle-eyed imitation of a fish looking out of an aquarium, it would probably take the form of an index finger pointing at the front door and the remark, delivered in the unconvinced manner of one who plays an understandably foolish game, that he could go out that way. Minnie registered a sudden but unalterable intention to get a trained servant if she had to send to the City. There was the French nurse—perhaps—— Her new-found frankness suddenly spoke out.

"In looking up a French nurse," she suggested, "I wonder if it would be too much trouble to look up a French housemaid also? We can get nobody here. And they would be company for each other."

Mr. Kirby thought that could be easily arranged. He left Minnie feeling somehow as though she had burst through baffling fogs into bright air. Already she looked back on that self bound with silly convention that had skirted around certain subjects instead of boldly discussing them. What *was* the sense! Yet she had been as tightly bound as any of them.

II

After Mr. Kirby's departure Minnie sank back in the armchair and gave herself over to dreams.

What should a mother dream of but her child? Always the future is to her rosy with his promise and achievement. To Minnie that had been true, as with all mothers; but the dream had been vague and thrust aside. But now the lid was off. This new freedom old Mr. Kirby seemed to have presented her, not only gave her full justification, but almost compelled her. The boy was to have the millions; he was to be educated to them.

Intensely her vivid rapid mind organized itself under the stimulation. Without knowing it, what she had set for herself was the forcing of the hand of destiny. In quick flashes passed before

her the influences she would pour into the child, and how she would do it. Unconsciously she evolved a sort of conviction of self-energy, in a materialistic fashion; an ideal of building rather than growth; as though the human soul were a structure of bricks which she could lay one on the other, rather than a living thing that must grow.

But to do her justice she was little concerned with the mere gratifications of wealth. Rather she lost herself in quivering vibrating visions of brilliant achievement through it; vaguely political or diplomatic. She saw her son a man eminent among his kind because of the strength of his grasp in controlling destinies, because of the charm of his wide culture and the grace of his recreations. The power of the visions entered into her; and the very necessary remoteness of their fulfilment gave an added leashed energy to her present eagerness. It became for her a vivid obsessing dream that was to possess her days and nights, that would compel her to bend every faculty of her clear, determined mind toward its realization. There is in such a vision a dynamic force that must expend itself.

III

She found an immediate outlet in Fred. It was all very well to order blithely a couple of French people to be delivered at earliest convenience; but unfortunately they were C. O. D. And unfortunately Fred had primitive ideas as to children's nurses. In his limited experience they were generally fat, always Irish, invariably loving and beloved, and cost about four dollars a week. Between this conception and the present plan lay a wide arid region that ordinarily could only be crossed by a slow and painful education. Minnie undertook to hustle Fred across it in the course of a single evening. Her programme had these How to be an Artist in Six Easy Lessons backed off the boards.

"Uncle was here to-day," she told him when they had settled down after dinner and his cigar was well alight. "We had a nice long talk about the boy."

"Yeah," agreed Fred, uninterested.

"Yes. We agreed perfectly on one thing. The only way he is to learn the foreign languages in a worth-while way is to begin so young that the accent is second nature to him."

Fred grinned. "He don't talk English yet," he pointed out. "Doesn't," corrected Minnie significantly. "That's just the

point. He ought to learn French just the way he is learning English, by talking it and hearing it. That's the way any young thing learns any language."

"Sure," agreed Fred. "What are you going to do? Talk French to him?"

"My French is atrocious."

"I thought it was pretty good."

"What do you know about it?" Minnie crushed him. "I have a fair knowledge of the language, and some fluency, but that's all."

"Well," submitted Fred, "seems to me that's enough. If we should go abroad some time you could jabber enough to get around, couldn't you?"

Minnie abandoned this point.

"I want Baby to grow up to be a cultivated man, if you don't."

"Oh, I do," rejoined Fred comfortably. "Stick on all the frills you want, as far as I'm concerned."

"We ought to have a Frenchwoman as nursery governess," Minnie plumped it out at him.

"What!" fairly shouted Fred, sitting up in consternation.

Minnie obligingly repeated.

"Have a jabbering Frenchwoman under our heels! And fire Katie! I thought she was just what you wanted."

"She's a very competent woman," agreed Minnie, "as a nurse girl. But we need something more now."

"I don't want any woman around the place I can't talk to," growled Fred.

"How silly! Talk to her, if you want. It might be a good chance for you to learn French, too!"

"Rats!" Fred greeted this with the contempt it deserved. He threw down his paper impatiently. "I don't see why there has to be such a confounded fuss just raising one small boy. Nobody ever made any such fuss about me when I was a kid, and I seem to have grown up all right."

"We've been over all that before, and I'm not going over it again," countered Minnie with a tinge of impatience. "Really, Fred, you seem to object to everything just for the sake of objecting. It's just as easy to live in a civilized fashion as in the barbarism you seem to enjoy. I actually did not dare ask Martha to do so simple a thing as to show Uncle Ezekiel out this afternoon for fear of what idiocy she might perpetrate. She is a fairly good cook, but she is impossible, simply impossible outside of the

kitchen. And imagine asking any servant you could get in Little Falls to wear a cap and apron! It's absurd! French servants are accustomed to such things as a matter of course."

"Do I gather this proposed nurse or governess or whatever you call her will condescend to answer the door?" queried Fred with heavy sarcasm.

"Of course not. Don't be stupid. But you can't expect a foreigner to come away out to Little Falls with no one, absolutely no one of her own race to talk to. She'd die of homesickness—indeed, she'd never stay. But with a French parlourmaid——"

Fred was looking congested. He threw his cigar into the fireplace and sat forward.

"Look here," he said roughly, "I want to get this straight. Your proposal is to hire *two* Frenchwomen?"

"A governess and a maid," supplemented Minnie firmly.

"Well, it can't be done; that's all."

"Would you mind telling me why?" begged Minnie, a sparkle in her eye.

"Simply that we can't afford it. It means one more servant than we have now; and unless I am mistaken it means higher wages than we are paying now," rejoined Fred bluntly.

"You certainly cannot expect to get well-trained and competent people for the price of these slatternly creatures one puts up with around here," replied Minnie coldly.

"Well, we can't afford it. You don't realize how much we are spending. The business is doing too well now to stand any further drain." He hesitated, and his belligerent manner was succeeded by a slight bewilderment. "You know that as well as I do," he continued. "I don't know what's got into you lately, Minnie."

She arose and came to sit on the arm of his chair. He had committed himself sufficiently so that the ground could now be successfully cut from beneath his feet.

"And now I'm the extravagant feather-headed wife rushing her doting husband to ruin," she mocked playfully. "Don't you know me better than that, you stupid old darling? Don't you suppose I see how hard you are working for Baby's future? and do you think I am going to do one tiny little thing that would jeopardize it?" She stroked his hair.

"Well, then, what's it all about?" grumbled Fred, half-mollified but still suspicious.

Minnie told him animatedly of Uncle Ezekiel's offer. Fred listened in silence, but as she talked his heavy face turned a dull red.

"Have you finished?" he asked at length. "Well, let me say this, right here and now! When I need charity, I'll retire to a charitable home."

Minnie stared at him wide-eyed. She had never seen this Fred before. The spirit of opposition in her flared to meet the spirit in him.

"There is no question of charity here; and you perfectly well know it. Uncle has surely a *little* right of supervision where his own money is concerned."

"To hell with his money! Have I asked him for his money? Let him keep it, or throw it to the birds, if he wants to," rejoined Fred.

"I think you are forgetting your language," said Minnie with restrained dignity.

"Beg your pardon," muttered Fred. "But look here," he went on in more reasonable tones, "I want you to get this thing perfectly clear. I don't give a continental red cent whether Uncle Zeke leaves his confounded money to the boy or not, if it's going to interfere with my private affairs. I am perfectly competent to support my own family, and I intend to do it without interference. That's final!"

Minnie, outraged at the last phrase, surveyed his square solid form exasperatedly; but she was too good a tactician to continue a frontal assault against an impregnable position.

"I see," she said sweetly. "Well, I, too, want to get this thing perfectly clear. Your position is that you are willing to deprive your son of advantages that would be of infinite value to his future life merely out of a silly personal pride."

"I don't think——" cried Fred, stung.

"Well, what else is it?" she pressed her point. "You can't supply these things yourself, and you won't let anybody else. It is perfectly silly and unreasonable to put Uncle Ezekiel in the same category as a charitable institution, and you know it. He's not offering you charity: he is offering the boy a rare chance to gain advantages that mighty few youngsters could expect."

"I expect to be able to offer him every advantage a man could ask," countered Fred doggedly. "It won't be but a few years now——"

"A few years!" interrupted Minnie. "And how long, may I ask, do you expect the boy to remain two years old? It's *now* he needs these things, while he is plastic and receptive and able to absorb. That's the whole *point*. That's where the real *advantage* comes in! Lots of people get these chances in later life, when they are more or less formed; but nothing can ever make up for these growing years."

Fred muttered. He had nothing to say to this, because it was beyond his usual range of thought. There seemed nothing to reply, and yet his basic attitude was unshaken. Minnie waited a moment, expectantly.

"You see?" she continued. "I'll tell you; why don't you accept it as a loan? Uncle Zeke would arrange that, I'm sure."

"I won't borrow," stated Fred positively.

"But you do borrow, right along, in your business."

"That's different."

"How is it different? You are so exasperating. Actually you consider your business more important than your own child! I have no patience with such an attitude. Give me one good reason for it, if you can."

But Fred could not do that. Having stated his position, which was instinctive, he had no reasons to offer, but retired into the citadel of a dumb and troubled immovability. Minnie, however, had by no means spent the impetus of her vision. She continued to talk about it, and gradually she lifted herself on her words to the high and bitter excitement of a useless battering against stone walls. In a more reasonable frame of mind she would have abandoned the assault and done the next best and sensible thing: have procured for her precious child ten thousand dollars' worth of these alleged inestimable advantages, through the sum Fred had given her two years before. Fred broodingly wondered about that, down in his shell-proof, but he would have died before he would have mentioned it. Minnie had by now become as set in her way as was Fred in his. If she had thought of the ten thousand at all, she would have considered a proposal to withdraw it from investment as another "robbing her child." Reasonable? Of course not. Nobody is ever reasonable in a Class A quarrel.

"Look here," said Fred at last, "you're probably right on one point. I want this kid to have everything he ought to have. Get your French nurse and your doo-dads and whatever you think he

needs. I'll manage it. But you keep Uncle Zeke out of this. I am still taking care of my own family without outside help."

IV

Minnie duly reported all this to Uncle Ezekiel. She told it with a light and vivacious humour.

"So you see," she ended. "That part of it is arranged. But I cannot get him to see our point of view in the matter. His obstinacy is too exasperating!"

"It is wrong-headed, but I find it in some respects admirable," returned Mr. Kirby.

"You do not have to contend with it."

The old gentleman looked at her speculatively.

"The contention is over," he pointed out.

"In this case; yes. What about future cases? I merely want you to know that I agree with you perfectly in the necessity for early advantages while the boy's mind is in a plastic state. But, frankly, with our limited finances, and with Fred in his present state of mind, I cannot answer for my ability to meet any more suggestions. Am I speaking too openly? I am merely facing the situation as candidly as you did yourself the other afternoon."

The lines about Mr. Kirby's eyes deepened and he bowed.

"You speak as a sensible woman, a woman of the world," he enunciated, "your point is self-evident, and I can see no advantage to be derived from covering it with false convention. As I had the honour to point out to you, we are actuated by a single motive in this matter, our desire that our young man shall not be deprived of his full chance of development. With that end in view, we must plan together."

"And Fred?" asked Minnie worriedly.

"I recall a saying of my boyhood. It possesses much wisdom. What a man doesn't know will not hurt him."

"Oh," cried Minnie, "I wouldn't like to go so far as to *deceive* Fred."

"In a good cause, my dear."

"But—but that is jesuitical!"

"I have," stated old Mr. Kirby, "a profound admiration for the practical wisdom of the Jesuits."

CHAPTER XVII

I

THE stage is now set, if you please, for a good slashing old moral melodrama entitled "The Curse of Wealth." Into the arcadian simplicity of Little Falls has come the serpent, dragging his slimy coils. It is always so easy to take a shot at wealth. It is spectacular; very few of us have it; those of us who are plutocrats either have become callous to the shoutings without the walls, or think ourselves exceptions to general iniquity.

Of course this is arrant nonsense; just as it is arrant nonsense to say that Brown would be a great genius if he didn't drink. But he does drink. If he had not been spoiled by drink, he would have been equally spoiled by something else. The weakness was there. Drink is spectacular; like wealth; that is all.

And wealth, like drink, is one of the solvents of life. It has nothing inherently evil in it; nor anything inherently good. It does a lot of damage to men's souls and bodies; but it does less damage in sum, from the eternal standpoint, than drab duty-people who are always wearisomely doing right. Oh, much less! Running water may go to waste, may even tear out a few bridges; but stagnant water breeds pestilence.

Nor is wealth as admirable in itself, as many, many worshipful people seem to think; any more than is the man who works with his hands. The latter is generally a Noble Toiler because he has to be. Nor is there inherent virtue in the middle grades with their "simple little homes," their commutation tickets, their rubber plants, and their blameless lives. They lack, perhaps, both temptation, opportunity, and initiative. But ordinarily they are the critics or the adoringly envious flatterers of the other two classes. They really should be the most in balance, the best proportioned, but there has been something left out. Moderately free, but weighted by mass conventions under a great crusted consciousness, they lack the courage to break through. There

is a freedom through wealth; there is a freedom through the balance of the average; there is a freedom through energy induced by the struggles of the toilers. There is likewise as great an arrested development due to fulness as the arrested development of the slums, or as that from the crusted-over inert consciousness. The real virtue is in the individual.

These things are all merely catalysts of life. They either free or inhibit, according to the individual reaction. And to each the individual reaction is the same in degree, depending entirely on the individual strength and bigness.

Having destroyed the melodrama, let us proceed.

II

So we can hardly ascribe to the Kirby millions more than a function as a somewhat concentrated solvent. They speeded things up, brought about quicker chemical reactions.

Freeman, for example, if he had been exposed to the solvent of poverty, would probably have become a weak malcontent, envious of all who had more than himself, holding down a mechanical job as long as times were good. If he had continued in the rubber-plant brigade he would presumably have landed as an "aesthetic" old bachelor with eyeglasses on a shoestring and a pretty taste in brasses. As it was, the high and shining example of old Mr. Kirby fired him with enough present ingenuity so that shortly he actually did import that Japanese servant, with whom he put on much satisfactory "dog." Score one for the vivifying influence of Wealth, say you. But the point is the essential inner Freeman; and that judgment is not for us.

The rest of society bucked up wonderfully, too. Mr. Kirby's standards were a delightfully vague mark to shoot at, for nobody knew what they were, and each made his own guesses. The only sure thing was that they must be different from the old ones of Little Falls. And nobody had any desire that Mr. Kirby should think him provincial. There were a lot more liveries forced upon protesting coachmen, and scandalized maids had to put on cap and apron or get out. Several husbands were bulldozed into dressing for dinner. Other symptoms were numerous. Kitty Caldwell discontinued her charming Sunday-night suppers, cooked by herself and served by Bert and all the guests. Now, when she entertained, she had in Charles and his bulgy dress suit, with Mrs. Charles darkly and voluminously in a kitchen background. It

made entertaining a heavy expense, but all hands felt it only appropriate and proper. Charles, by the way, was dropped back a peg by the new order. No longer did he appear as the Old Family Retainer in such homes as the Dunnings or the Pines. The new order had hit them, too, and they now felt it incumbent to have permanent Old Family Retainers of their own. Oh, things speeded up, I promise you; and Life tossed her head and got out her lip stick!

So far, so good: any increased awareness is at least in the line of development.

CHAPTER XVIII

I

IN DUE course the Frenchwomen appeared and took up their duties in the Kirby household. They were satisfactorily *chic* in appearance. Minnie found them a great comfort, not only in the matter of service, in which they were well trained, but also as respects many small side issues. Marie, for example, ran ribbons in the underclothes without being told to do so, and turned on the bath water in the morning, and gathered and arranged flowers in all the living rooms. These refinements on the usual made Minnie feel very luxurious. And also it was a great minor satisfaction to carry on with her a rapid French interchange before the impressed afternoon caller. And Marie was distractingly pretty in her starched apron and soubrette cap. Angélique, the governess, as be seemed her job, was not so young and good-looking, but she was exceedingly competent. After watching her quick and uncompromising methods of placing the small Kirby in order of cleanliness for the day, one could not doubt she knew her business. Nor could one fear that the youngster would not have sufficient opportunity to learn the French language. Fred said she jabbered. Certainly she and Marie, in their off hours, showed no evidence that there had ever been Trappist blood in their families.

One happy and immediate benefit resulted from her engagement. She proved totally unequal to the rugged and un-Gallic syllables of Ezekiel. After some thirty or forty gallant attempts she gave it up and nicknamed her charge Zozo. Zozo it became.

II

For the next few years Zozo becomes the real centre of our story for the reason that he was the real centre of the thoughts of all the important people of our tale, with the exception of Freeman. Each had rather more than a special interest in raising up this small boy according to his own ideas, because each felt that

the youngster was rather more significant in the scheme of things than the average. He was significant in several different ways.

The most active were, of course, the members of the Committee of Two who alone had a clearly definite idea of what they were driving at. Minnie and Uncle Ezekiel went into almost daily session together over his needs and the direction of his education. Uncle had exact blue prints of what constituted a properly cultivated gentleman; and Minnie read all the books she could obtain on children.

Between the two a plan of action was always forthcoming and was duly carried out. Their activity was enormous and their field of application limited. An orphan asylum would just about have absorbed their output.

This was all interesting enough and comparatively harmless in the tenderest years when the questions to be solved were rather of digestion than dialectics, of intestines rather than intellect. But shortly the subject of education loomed.

"The public schools of this country are completely out of the question," stated Uncle Zeke firmly. "There is nothing either distinctive or individual about them. In that respect some of the foreign school systems are head and shoulders above us. The French, for example; they make such a specialty of *expression*."

To this Minnie, knowing nothing about it, agreed enthusiastically.

"For several reasons," continued the old gentleman judicially, "it seems inadvisable to send him away, at his age, to a foreign school."

"That *baby*!" cried Minnie, horrified at the idea. "Why, I wouldn't be happy a minute!"

Mr. Kirby glanced at her quizzically. The importance of her happiness had not occurred to him; however, he did not express his thought.

"In this formative period it is better that he remain near us," he said. "There are many things to be inculcated beside the scholastic. It seems to me that private instruction is our only solution."

"He might go to Miss Hastings," agreed Minnie doubtfully, naming the only private school.

But Mr. Kirby shook his head.

"All the faults of the public school without its discipline. No; we must have a tutor."

So a tutor was had, a young man who mysteriously appeared from nowhere at Uncle's behest. That was one of the conspiracies. Fred accepted the comparatively small expense of his tuition fee without thought of why this young man should have come so providentially to Little Falls at just this time, and without curiosity as to his occupation or means of livelihood outside of tuition hours. Minnie knew.

Another matter that much occupied the Committee of Two was the nomination of suitable playmates. The little Zozo was much too important to be permitted to mingle indiscriminately with the young life of the place as did every other child. He would learn all sorts of things not suitable to his future estate: rough, rude ways; slangy English; wrong accents; bad manners; false standards of all kinds; and worse. Not to speak of germs. So each hopeful was canvassed thoroughly. No one was quite worthy; but the Committee felt that young companionship of some sort was necessary. The Committee was very wise as to such things, balancing all the elements in a most intelligent way, and priding itself on its complete avoidance of bigotry and dogma. So, after considerable hesitation and much discussion, a selection was made of permitted playmates. At stated hours these unfortunate creatures came over under command to perform a solemn dull rite known as Playing with Zozo Kirby. Their attitude was that of the members of the well-known Light Brigade. Angélique was always in watchful supervision. There is no profit in details. We can only repeat: the child had every advantage. To our regret we must record a Fauntleroy suit, but as Angélique was always about there was no frightfulness.

III

Old Mr. Kirby certainly spared no personal pains in the matter. He was not of those who conceive their full duty in the premises is fulfilled by the laying out of a programme or the signing of a check. Considering his tastes, and his age, he seems to deserve great commendation. He had begun this experiment in rather a detached frame of mind, willing to leave the issue to the immortal gods; but he had ended by becoming personally interested. Ties of race tightened about him. With no knowledge of or sympathy with children, he, nevertheless, five days of the week, voluntarily devoted two hours of his time to a personal effort with this small boy.

"Were there any other way I should indubitably adopt it," he told Marcel, "but there is no other way. Certain points of view, certain tastes, certain feelings for the subtleties of life cannot otherwise be implanted. Frankly they exist only in this household. I have therefore arranged with Mrs. Kirby that the boy is to come here between four and five of the afternoon. The object is not direct instruction, of which he obtains what is necessary at home, so much as an opportunity of learning by contact and by the examples which we shall plan to set before him. I shall depend on you, Marcel, to employ your intelligence in this matter."

And so yet another Committee of Two came into existence.

Five days in the week, therefore, the miniature Zozo might have been seen, about three of the afternoon, walking down the Hill under convoy by Angélique to call on Uncle. He looked good enough to eat when all was ready—or at least so Minnie declared. A square, small, chubby-legged little figure he made, with a homely somewhat freckled face that somehow did not seem to fit the get-up. He trudged sturdily alongside Angélique. Angélique was at most times a nuisance, but on these occasions was a welcome fortress of safety. From her lee Zozo could peer forth curiously on circling members of that terrifying but fascinating alien race known as "bad boys." These swashbuckling marauders cruised just beyond the shot of Angélique's carronades and demonstrated by gesture and word of mouth their status in life. Zozo looked upon them round-eyed, but made no reply.

Once inside the big iron gate of the Kirby place he could let go Angélique's hand and run on ahead, down and up the curve of the driveway. He enjoyed this: though he had to keep in mind an immaculate appearance, and so could not run to right or left the beaten or sprinkled way, as he would have liked. At the top of the veranda steps he waited for Angélique. This was one of the high lights of the expedition; for the almost instantaneous opening of the heavy door as a result of this appearance gave him a vague feeling of controlling mighty destinies. Marius, the second man, quite silent and aloof and awe-inspiring, let them in. They were met in mid-hall by Marcel, who smiled and greeted them in French and was much more human. Marius then led Angélique solemnly away to the Celestial Regions; while Marcel took Zozo into the living rooms to the left. Only once had Zozo ever himself penetrated to the Celestial Regions. It was by

accident, at a moment when he had been temporarily abandoned; and he was almost immediately snatched away from them. But he remembered them wistfully as full of jolly people, and ravishing smells, and bursts of laughter. One of the jolly people—a fat one with a pointed moustache like Uncle's, dressed all in white with a white cap—had given him a marvellous confection of pastry. He had intended to take this home, because of course he should eat nothing between meals, but it was ravished from him in the row that seemed automatically to accompany all the pleasant things of life.

In the living apartments Uncle awaited him. He marched forward and shook hands gravely, "doing his devoirs" as he had been taught.

"And how is my little man to-day?" Uncle invariably asked.

"Very well, thank you, sir," replied Zozo by rote.

"What have you been doing with yourself?" inquired Uncle.

Zozo became inarticulate and almost dumb. There was no rote for this. He wriggled, making monosyllabic evasions by way of reply, preferably in a Zuluesque grunt or click-language. Mr. Kirby was tremendously polite and patient; casting about for subjects of converse, assuming the playful archness of phrase deemed suitable for communication with extreme youth.

He was almost pathetic in this endeavour. In vain he tried his best to get outside himself to interpret his experience to the boy. He knit his brows, puzzling how to make the appeal; the baffled puzzlement of age before youth, the struggle to remember. Often he was silent, fearing to make a false move. At ease with the greatest of the earth, he sometimes found himself embarrassed before the inscrutability of the small decorous boy.

To-day he had, in consultation with Marcel, prepared one of his numerous experiments on the perceptions of his great nephew. After a few moments of high but halting converse, he led the way into another apartment. Here had been displayed a riot of harmonious colour. Hanging on the walls; draped over every object in the room, were yards and yards of gorgeous oriental silks and brocades. When Zozo entered this room both Uncle and Marcel—who had slipped in unobtrusively—stiffened to attention. His reactions here should be very illuminating and indicative.

Zozo stopped short at the unwonted aspect of the place.

"Gee, you've changed things all around," he declared in rather a disappointed tone. "Can't I have something to play with?"

He was thinking of a glass cabinet—now covered with the blue-green shimmering dream of some Rajah's weaver, long dead—where were ivory chessmen that on one gorgeous occasion he had been permitted to range in battle array on the floor.

Mr. Kirby and Marcel were always trying similar experiments; and, it must be confessed, with similar results. Sometimes they were in music; sometimes in fragrance or in form; sometimes, as now, in colour or texture. Though they produced little of apparent significance, the conspirators consoled themselves by the thought that they were "forming taste." One outside the personal interest in these experiments would have said that Zozo was disappointing and stiff. As a matter of fact, though he did not know it, he felt the atmosphere of the laboratory experiment, and was unconsciously restless and awkward because of it. He always approached the Kirby house with a dark suspicion that he was going to be educated in some intriguing and unsportsmanlike manner; and was therefore really in a mood for little more than a cautious inspection of things.

Nevertheless, Mr. Kirby was very hopeful. The youngster should have proper ideas as far as he was able to present them. Dimly he realized the cross-currents from the other influences about the boy, and their increasing power in the future. The basic ideas and tastes must be experimented with and inculcated before the lad should become cramped and provincialized. The money-making idea that made Fred's whole conception was such a bore! And yet, Mr. Kirby realized quite well, Fred was not a negligible obstruction that could be swept aside. How go about it tactfully with Fred? He must consult Minnie again about that. If he could only have the boy to himself for a while! could take him abroad where in decent and leisurely fashion, without the cross-currents, the fundamentals of life could be taught him! Here there was the beastly American spirit to contend with. Even Cousin Jim had it, most illogically! Cousin Jim was approachable and sympathetic as to the necessity of wider development, but he insisted on at least a profession for the boy, did not at all get the idea of the cultivated gentleman of taste and leisure. Harped on what he called a standing among men!

So the old gentleman's mind ran, all the time he was going here and there showing things of beauty and significance, and continuing to carry on high converse. They found themselves at last back in the sitting room.

"What do you think you would like to do when you grow up to be a big man?" asked Mr. Kirby.

"I don't know," mumbled Zozo, whose secret ambition was to be a newsboy.

"How would you like to go around the world with me some day? We'll sail for days and days on the big blue ocean; and we'll spend a winter in the snow mountains of Switzerland and play winter games while you're in school there. We'll go from country to country having a great time."

"I'd like it," said Zozo, brightening.

"But if you're going to have any fun with the other boys you would have to speak their language, wouldn't you?" continued Uncle. "By the way, how is the German coming on?"

Zozo's momentary interest died; he might have known there was a catch in it.

He addressed Zozo in German, trying with no remarkable success to elicit replies in the same tongue. In like manner, and with about the same conspicuous success, he was always attempting to carry on their intercourse in French. Zozo, thanks to his association since infancy with Angélique, chattered French like a native; and would do so with her. But Uncle knew how to talk English, and the obstinate Anglo-Saxon streak in the boy felt the silliness of walking when you could ride.

IV

Mr. Kirby walked slowly back to his own little room and touched a match to the fire in the grate. It was early summer, but he felt chilly, and for some reason the broad daylight bothered him. So he drew the shades and the heavy hangings, and sat before the blaze in a half-twilight of his own making.

He was a little tired after his effort: he always was. There was no discouragement as yet; but there was the realization of the wide chasm that opens between age and youth unless it is kept bridged by constant association. And he was upheld by his positive knowledge that it was worth while. He had only to look back at his own experience to realize that; and he had begun his experience at so much later an age than Zozo's.

Yet he had been most fortunate. Out of all the swarming people in his runaway world that he should have bumped into Calthorp first off: Calthorp, the artist of really great vision, born of American and French parents, with the rare faculty of seeing

stripped realities! It was about the time the first impulse of his revolt had about spent itself and he was beginning to feel small and lonesome and uncertain. Then this huge bearded shabby man had swooped down on him—it was in the Boston railroad station, though how either of them came to be in Boston old Mr. Kirby could not for the life of him recall. The big man roared when he talked, and waved a short pipe, scattering ashes. For some reason little Ezekiel promptly told him all about it.

"Running away?" commented Calthorp, seating himself on a baggage truck and swinging the youngster up beside him. "Well, that shows spirit. I'm a judge of running away; because, you see, I did that same thing myself when I was a little older than you are. And a very good job it was, too. Is yours a good job?"

The little boy was puzzled at this and asked what was meant.

"I'm asking *why* you ran away," explained the big man.

Ezekiel tried to tell him. There seemed so little to tell, when it was boiled down to words, and that little sounded inadequate and unreasonable. Old Mr. Kirby felt now a warm glow at the heart as he remembered how instantly his new friend had understood.

"Strangling and smothering of the free spirit of man," he had concluded, "a capital crime. You are fully justified, my son. And where are you running to?"

"I don't know," confessed the small boy.

"You are the very man for me!" cried Calthorp. "That's exactly where I am going myself!"

He had immorally asked no more questions, made no attempts at inquiry. The two had boarded ship and had eventually landed in a Paris garret. It was made of stone and had a hole in the top, so it was called a studio. There they dwelt for several years, whenever they had no money. When they had money, they travelled. That was not too often, for Calthorp, though a soul of great vision, lacked the hand; and his translations of beauty, while suggestive and inspiring to artists, had little sale. Sometimes, indeed, the pair of them were a bit put to it for the plain physical necessities of life.

But the glorious real necessities of life, as Calthorp saw them, never lacked. Into the young and sensitive mind of his charge he poured the vision of his own rainbow world and his ideal of beauty as a real pursuit of happiness.

The old man sighed and poked his fire. He saw the brave light of that torch shining across the years.

Then one day Calthorp took ill. It was a cold, he said; and he remained indoors wrapped in an old quilted gown while the lad went out to perform one or another of the odd services to mankind for which he was paid a franc or so here and there. Which in itself indicated the present low economic state. Indeed, euphemism was no longer possible as to their status in life.

"My son," Calthorp told him, "at last you can be assured that we are conducting our existence romantically according to the specification of the best masters: we are living in direst poverty."

The idea seemed to weigh on neither of them. Nevertheless, Calthorp thought of it again, as was evidenced by a document written on the back of a studio rent bill (unpaid) found by the boy after the unexpected fatal termination of the illness. He could remember it now, word for word, as others remember holy writ. "Know ye that I, Edmund Calthorp, sound of mind though impaired of body, do name Ezekiel Kirby as my sole and beloved heir. To him I bequeath all that I have for his wise use and possession; both of riches and of trash and all there is to which I can lay claim. To him I make over my blessing, my ideals, my outlook on life; together with all harmony of line, of colour, of beauty. To him I bestow my due and just share in the splendour of days and the peace of nights and the glories of the free spirit that seeks. Those are his freely, to use to the utmost, together with my love which shall always abide."

Calthorp had written this with his tongue in his cheek and his eye on the few poor sticks of studio furniture that made all his worldly possessions: but the scrap of paper, written in a weak straggling hand, shortly represented a modest competence. For all its whimsical expression, it was recognized as a valid will by those who came seeking Calthorp as the legatee of the family from which he, too, had run away in his youth. It was not a fortune, but it set young Kirby free to do as he pleased. And what he pleased had been formed by the artist: that was his real bequest.

There came the eager acquisition of an education; the passionate gathering from Old-World abundance. The years tripped by. Almost as an incident, it seemed, the modest competence was magically, stupendously increased. To any one else that would have been the real romance of the story; how an unconsidered little piece of land acquired long long ago in payment of a debt—rocky, stubborn, useless—held only because the taxes were but

a few dollars a year—should overnight produce literal millions in newly important oil. But to Kirby, still moving in the vision-land bequeathed him by a great soul, this was only a more perfect opportunity for fulfilment. The impetus of his association with Calthorp had not yet spent itself. The completed man who later returned to Little Falls was then in formation, and he was absorbed in the process. The wealth was an adjunct, an aid. Only later, when the impetus was spent, did he examine the embroidery of life.

The result of it all? To old Mr. Kirby a satisfactory ideal of life, as we have seen. To the great Pattern-Maker? That we cannot know. But this we can say: the being who does not continue to take in, who does not drink afresh at the source, who from choice or from limitation is satisfied to work over and over old material from the origin of life, without the addition of new, in some degree fails. Admirable as a type may be, still it is only a type. It is a pity to cut the roots, to lose contact with life. It is a pity to lose the fresh growing quality, to become petrified, a dried thing, however beautiful it may be. It is a pity to become a highly developed mechanism, if it cannot be used, if so much of it would break or crumble or change if set into action. It is dangerous to draw apart, no matter how noble the dream. There comes a time when efforts toward righting things seem futile; when oversensitization becomes passivity; when heart-vitality is corroded by cynicism; when our exquisitely sensitized vision becomes sterile because of the lack of human contact. Generally the victim calls this fastidiousness and is content.

Old Mr. Kirby was content, and in retrospect the clouds of glory still trailed from his relation with his protector. In him had been stimulated a hunger: how could he in turn stimulate the hunger in this new generation? how displace the American-raised boy's antipathy to education? Cousin Jim to the contrary notwithstanding, it was the environment. The exquisite things of life were in the air to be breathed over there: crudity here. It came back to the same thing. *He must* get the boy away as young as possible, to travel the world in his company. That would give him a free hand.

v

Zozo and Angélique trudged back up the Hill. At home there awaited the little Pierce girl and a reluctant and glowering Bobby

Post. That was Bobby Post's day to be summoned, and he didn't like it. None of the kids liked being summoned to play with Zozo. Oh, Zozo was probably all right, but he didn't know nothin' and that Angélique stood over you all the time. The visits resulted in decorous, half-hearted games, generally of the sort played with apparatus; or else solemn sight-seeing tours about the place. And the few desirable spots, such as Amanda's laundry, or the stable where Ezra still reigned in company with a very cross and aged spotty dog, were precisely the places where you could not linger. In the one case you interfered with Amanda's work; in the other you got the stable smell in your clothes. That was according to Angélique. Bunk-the-dog, a present from Cousin Jim, and at this stage of his career a loose-skinned puppy with a joint in his back just behind the shoulders, did his best to cheer things up. The only trouble with Bunk-the-dog was that he was one segment of a vicious circle; he was subdued in demeanour under reproof; he cheered up to frantic action with the slightest encouragement; frantic action invariably resulted in enthusiastic dirty paws on somebody's bosom; the latter crime led back to reproof and subdued demeanour again. Promptly at six o'clock the selected playmates departed, Bobby Post with a whoop, Celia Pierce demurely and in satisfaction over a lady-like afternoon. Celia was a precocious child with her small world already neatly wrapped.

This night, glory be, Father came home early. That did not often happen. Zozo's bedtime was located at the hygienic point of least resistance; so that customarily Father arrived only after he had been tucked in. Now Zozo followed the big man into the den, hoping with all his little heart that he would be pummelled and jounced about and poked in the ribs. But Fred was tired to-night, and a little down. He seated himself in the biggest leather chair, lighted a pipe, and motioned the small boy to his lap. Zozo climbed aboard contentedly. He was thoroughly happy just to sit and watch, fascinated, the curl of smoke from the pipe, bright blue from the bowl, dull gray from his father's mouth. He wondered why that was, but he did not ask. At length Fred sighed and aroused himself.

"Well, sonny, how goes it?" he asked. "What you been up to to-day?"

That was a typical grown-up question and merited little more than the monosyllable Zozo accorded it. What should he be up

to to-day that he wasn't up to every other day? If it was startling phenomenal or catastrophic news Father was enquiring about, that was covered by the single word "nothing" he had offered in reply. But unexpectedly Father pursued the subject further.

"Did you visit Uncle?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do up there?"

Zozo considered. He had done nothing up there, as far as he knew. About the only intriguing feature had been Uncle's suggestion as to foreign travel; and even that had had a catch in it, to do with the study of the German language. However, he told about it.

Strangely enough this seemed to interest Father. He began to ask questions, queer questions having to do with all the other times he had been to Uncle's, and what Mother had had to say about these ideas, and whom he played with, and whom he liked best among the children.

"Listen, sonny," said Father at last. "I want to tell you something, and I want you to remember it if you can. You do just as Mother tells you, and study hard, and remember what you are told. But there is one thing more. If you are going to grow up to be a man people will like and respect you've got to *do* something, and you've got to do it *hard*."

Zozo settled down quite comfortably in the crook of his father's arm. This, his practised experience told him, was going to be Improving Discourse, and his mind automatically closed until the shower should pass. And he liked the feel of Father: there was something comfortable and understanding about him. Pity he was so rarely there. And then, too, he was not really in authority. Mother and Uncle were the real deciders, and they were always about. He had known that even when he was very young indeed.

Fred talked on with great though repressed earnestness. After the first few sentences his discourse was away over the boy's head. He was in reality not so much talking to his son as stating his inner conviction, releasing the long-repressed antagonism slowly and imperceptibly accumulated. And since, whatever the vehicle of thought, naked conviction makes itself felt as a force, Zozo's attention came back to him at last.

"And don't you make any mistake," Fred was saying with repressed vehemence, "concentration on what you are after and

determination to get it is the only thing that counts if you want to be of some use in the world. People are just a herd of cattle. How do they know what they want? Be a man, if you're big enough. You give them what you decide they should have. That's Big Business! What do they know about it, anyway? They're lucky to have a few able men to work for them! I tell you what, if it wasn't for those few, the whole world would fly to pieces!" He brought his fist down on the arm of the chair. "Impractical lot!

"Well, you be one of the big ones. And you can't do it by scattering all over the place and running around the world while you're young and frittering away your time just at the age when you ought to be making your start. Choose a line and *stick to it!* That's the way to be a success! That's power! That's what people recognize! You'll know you've made good when people point you out and say: 'He knows all there is to be known about such and such a thing.' This artistic, philosophical, poetical stuff may be all right as a frill when you get older; but when you're young and making your start they are dangerous playthings!"

He paused, staring unseeing into the gathering dimness of his study. Naturally dumb and unexpressive, the slow chafing of his inner convictions had warmed him to flame. For the first time in his life he was formulating and stating his creed.

"All flapdoodle aside," he continued, "these are the *facts*; and anybody with two eyes in their head can see them. Here we are in the world. We've got to have all kinds of *things*, commodities—all sorts of things, fresh food and canned food and clothes and banks and courts—everything. And the people who count are the people who supply the world what it needs to live comfortably. Not these poet fellows with their dreams. Shucks! I notice even they burn coal and eat bread and sardines and wear dressing gowns while they do their dreaming! And somebody's got to supply these things.

"That's the commonsense way of looking at things, and you can't get around it. We are here to *produce* what people *want*. And the only way to do that is to double up your fists and *go to it!* Punch the head of any one who tries to stop you. You just scrap your way to the top. That's success! That's power in life! People will call you names, but when you're at the top they'll thank you for giving them what they need—maybe! Anyway, you've got the satisfaction."

The boy did not quite follow all this, of course, but he felt the fighting energy of it, and he was thrilled. But again the puzzle of the cross-currents: there was Uncle who brushed business off his finger tips as if he had handled a dusty bottle——

Minnie bustled into the room, full of electric energy, breaking the spell. She wanted to know if he had done his arithmetic for to-morrow's lessons. He had not. In a flurry of reproach, of which Fred got his indirect share, he was hurried out to accomplish it before suppertime. Mother was another bit of the stupendous puzzle. The boy's heart responded to her real love for him; but the excess of her energy and determination overrode him, and congealed his ideas, made him dumb in expressing his desires before her.

CHAPTER XIX

I

ZOZO really had not much chance, though almost everybody thought he had every chance. He was practically alone against man, with, as his only allies, merely his natural resistant instincts of childhood, the artificial epidermis he grew through attrition, and Cousin Jim. A number of strong characters were trying to use him as a mirror in which to see themselves and their ideas reflected.

To be sure Fred as yet pretended to have little to say, but he was in the offing, and his ideas were as definite as anybody's. It was the convention then that women knew nothing of business, and should not attempt to understand; and that men had nothing to do with keeping house or raising the children. The average man stood ready to take over the product in its adolescence and then to impose upon it a new sort of discipline and a new set of ideals having to do with business. When it did not work, he was very much surprised and invariably blamed failure or only partial success on the ineptitude of the child. So did everyone else. No one could see how so able a man could have such a son.

This attitude was intensified in Fred's case by his profound admiration for Minnie's mind and ability. He might, as intimated in his unique outthrust to Zozo, dissent from certain details, but that dissent did not in the slightest degree shake his faith to the extent that he even dreamed of interfering. He'd attend to all that when the time came, when Zozo—grown to man's estate—should become the Son with the capital S. In the meantime, he would build up the business in anticipation and take it out in grumbling a little at what he called "foolishness" or "frills."

Minnie and Uncle Ezekiel Kirby and Marcel and Angélique and others continued to offer influence and instruction and physical prohibition according to the rules and ideas they had laid down for themselves, and to expect results in accordance. The

only unknown factor, according to their calculations, was the X of Zozo's natural endowment and temperament. It occurred to none of them that that X was a very small x indeed to start with, and that its capitalization was largely the result of their own efforts. They conceived of the child mind as the grown-up mind made small. It never occurred to them that the child mind was a thing in itself, quite different.

For instance, there could be no doubt that Zozo was growing up to be rather a silent and sullen little boy, shot with a queer streak of obstinacy. At times—as when exhibited toward Uncle—it was almost terrifyingly exasperating. There were occasions when Zozo got himself soundly spanked for it. By this means he gained an intellectual appreciation that it was naughty to hang back and be silent and not to answer promptly and do what he was bid at once and with some intelligence. He knew it, but he could not bring himself to do it. Something in spite of himself made him hang back. Since he knew this was naughty, he was conscious of sin; and since he could not help it, he at times looked upon himself as an outlaw desperately at odds; and since he continued increasingly in the same course he got at last to the point where he did not so greatly care.

Minnie saw and combated the outside manifestations of this. It never occurred to her to read what the outside manifestations might mean inside. She ascribed it all to heredity.

"He gets that queer stubborn streak from his father," she told herself.

Or else she laid it to the undemonstrative reticence which she conceived as characteristic of the masculine.

"Men are such *dumb* creatures, naturally!" she cried gaily after an exhibition of reluctant "yes mothers" and "dunno mothers." "I have positively to *extract* things from Fred!"

There were times when she confessed to herself that Zozo was "difficult"; but that was as far as she would go.

Sad to say, Little Falls was not quite so charitable. They called him stupid, and ascribed to him a sullen arrogance which they attributed to a pride of which poor Zozo was quite innocent.

Old Mr. Kirby, watching keenly, also entertained the idea of natural stupidity, but would not accept it as yet. In some strange fashion which he could not himself understand, this idea of a family succession had grown on him of late. His standards were as fiercely uncompromising as ever, but he was becoming more

reluctant to give up hope that they could be met. He discussed the point with Marcel, as far as his pride would permit.

"He is not as responsive as I could wish," said he.

"Monsieur Zozo is still very young, an infant," replied Marcel, whose astuteness had long since shown him that his patron needed encouragement rather than opinion.

"That is true," reflected Mr. Kirby, "and yet at his years I was myself beginning to be alive to the graces of life." His mind slipped back in the facile fashion of age to his first days with Calthorp, and he sighed.

"Pardon if I call Monsieur's attention to the fact that human beings, like the animals, differ much. Some mature later than others and are none the less remarkable. I would mention a compatriot of Monsieur's, General Grant, as only one of many striking examples. This is in all probability true of Monsieur Zozo. Reflect, monsieur; he is on the one side a Kirby, one of Monsieur's race; on the other, Madame his mother is, whatever her limitations of opportunity, of the greatest force and intelligence. As for Monsieur's own experience, my observation convinces me that his aptitudes developed rather before the normal time—that he was, in a word, remarkable for his precociousness, like Napoleon Bonaparte, or Charles James Fox, or Beethoven."

"You seem to be well informed," observed Mr. Kirby drily.

"Outside the service of Monsieur," submitted Marcel, "my greatest interest has always been toward philosophical history."

II

But Zozo in these external manifestations was only as his observation of things and his contact with them had made him. In his first and simple perceptions the world was a fascinating sort of place, full of things to be greeted and explored joyously. But almost immediately he discovered that he must have been mistaken. Most of the fascinating things seemed to be guarded by dragons of fierce and painful penalties. The first wash of an impression was—oh, very dimly and quite "unrationalized"—that it was somehow stupid to make so amusing a world so difficult. For of course his was the child's nearsighted world—physically, mentally, and spiritually. He could not see beyond the immediate things about him: his eyes were not built that way. And grown-up penalties are nearly always farsighted.

So his first social reaction was one of bafflement. The

world *could* be quite nice, if let alone; but it appeared to be full of people, like scene shifters, whose sole concern was to shove things in front of him just as he got started in any direction. He could have got along quite comfortably if it had not been for this; or even if there had been only a reasonable amount of it. But it seemed invariable. It took away all spontaneity, all fluidity. It stiffened things. It engendered a *cross* feeling; and it made him fighting obstinate to get beyond the obstruction just to see the other side. It is always maddening to be invariably thwarted just as you get started. There was already a trace of resentment smouldering within him; a trifling thing, perhaps, but to the discerning eye—if such there had been—a portent of tragedy. Perhaps there *was* a little heredity of Fred in this.

Nor would this have been so bad in a normal situation. But here he was the centre of so much ambition! There were so many cross-purposes, so much pulling hither and yon of divergent ideals, so much throwing of obstruction by one across a path indicated by the other. They were building a boy, you see, as one builds a house with bricks; and they were busy about it all the time, standing in line with more bricks in their hands, awaiting their turn. The boy had nothing to do with it except to furnish the building site. It escaped them that a boy is not a building site but a garden where things are planted and allowed to grow.

A few brave weeds and blossoms pushed up in odd corners not yet overlaid with bricks. Zozo was really as yet a nice, cheerful, likable boy when you got him off in one of these corners. It was only when herded to the centres of thwarting and obstruction that he became brooding and secret. Indeed, he was positively garrulous at times. To a wise interpreter this should have been significant. To Minnie it was only a source of exasperation. Why Zozo should so obviously expand in the company of Amanda, the laundress, or the reprehensible Cousin Jim, or Bunk-the-dog was to her only evidence of a frivolity—sometimes she called it a tendency to low company—which might grudgingly be called natural enough at his age, but which must be eradicated. Amanda could be forbidden; Cousin Jim could not be forbidden, exactly, but he could be deprecated; Bunk-the-dog could be merely deplored. To them all was attached a vague guilt of disapproval.

The spark was being slowly smothered, yet at times it flared clear and bright. No one of those who thought they knew Zozo through and through would have recognized him then at all.

They were just moments. He knew them by a streak of excitement right through his chest, an excitement over something that was just beyond him, nearly attainable, almost within reach. It came at odd times, a fluttering for freedom.

One night he started up suddenly, broad awake. The room was all queer and white and dark at the same time. He slipped out of bed (forbidden) and tiptoed to the window. O magic moonlight! It was the same world as that of his waking hours but *entirely* different! Even the ground sparkled! That was a great strange world to pop into suddenly out of sleep. Mm! it smelled good! There never was such air in the ordinary world! There came again that stab of recognition.

"*What* are you doing here, you naughty boy!" cried his mother's exasperated voice behind him. "Angélique! how can you sleep there like a log with such a performance going on! I should think if I could hear him in the next room, you might have heard him in here. What do you *mean*, you bad child! I don't know what to make of you! You're shivering! You never stop to think that if you get sick it's I who will have to take care of you!"

He was haled back to bed, dumbly obstinate as to explanation. But he had fooled them. Nobody would ever know about that! They couldn't shut that out, anyway!

There were moments like that, unsuspected.

III

And there was the time of the boat excursion, which was made up for Zozo's especial benefit, for the sole purpose of improving his perceptive faculties for natural beauty, and his sense of historical association by immediate reference to things that had happened. To this end he was well primed beforehand, and he should have been looking forward eagerly to seeing with his own eyes the things he had been taught. It was quite a good excursion, with quite a number of people along as a by-product. The by-product got interested in each other, and Angélique got interested in the engineer, so Zozo was left to his own devices. He was sitting on a camp stool and staring solemnly overside, so it was supposed that he was absorbing things as per schedule.

After a little he arose from his camp stool and sauntered forward. The engine room looked enticing, but Angélique was there. He discovered the forward deck. It had a good slope

and the sun was warm. He lay down on it and discovered that a rope dangled just above him. He touched it idly with his foot.

Suddenly he found himself possessed of an entrancing occupation. He kicked at the rope, over and over again, first with one foot, then with the other, without variation. He was perfectly content, for there was the feel of the sun and the breeze, and he was enjoying a blissful vacancy of mind. In the complete abandonment he had but one emotion, very faint—a wonder that lying on his back and kicking at a dangling rope could be so *altogether* satisfactory. But it was marvellous. The sky was so blue and so queer and wiggly in spots when he looked at it hard. He wondered what those floating things in it were. Floating thoughts, like them, slipped through his mind.

"Oh, *shucks*," said they, "but the sun feels good! Guess I'll roll over on my stomach and see how warm the boards are."

Which was not precisely the comment called for by their geographical position at that moment. He should have been identifying that point where Mad Anthony Wayne did something or other. But this sort of a chance did not often happen, and Nature grabbed for it, clutched at it in her dire need. There was not a thought in his poor little brain; nothing but a delicious numbness.

That could not last, of course. Shortly he was yanked back to a contemplation of Mad Anthony Wayne. There was considerable scandal about taking all this trouble just to have him lie in the sun. But it was one of the great moments. An idea had come to him, by illumination; a discovery. It was that thinking was a nuisance; and it was unnecessary because it was pleasanter just rhythmically to repeat gestures or words without having to tie them down to anything.

The latter was the grown-up method, and Zozo found contact with grown-ups in general pretty deadening. They talked things he could not grasp, but they seemed to expect him to grasp them without further ado. That just puzzled him. After a bit he shut up and stopped trying. Particularly was this true of Uncle Ezekiel. Zozo summed up this worthy as a queer duck, which verdict would considerably have astounded the latter. The sort of presents he gave would, in Zozo's private opinion, have proved it without need of other evidence—sets of books, and pictures, and little statues, and other things that grown-ups seemed to like. Mother told him they were very valuable; but they did not look

it to Zozo. Zozo dreaded his visits to Uncle, not only because the elder Mr. Kirby was a formidable person, and improving to the mind, and hard to listen to, but because the visits themselves were such a plain nuisance. Mother made such a fuss about clothes and things. To be sure, Uncle had some extremely fascinating things in his house, but one could not play with them. Indeed, the whole world of grown-ups was stuffy.

Except, of course, Cousin Jim and Amanda, with some good points about Ezra when not too prickly.

Amanda was a wonderful creature. She lived in a funny little house below the Hill, and she had a lot of children. The latter were strictly forbidden the Kirby place, so they did not matter much, except as atmospheric background. But Amanda herself was all there, three days in the week. Her grammar was deplorable, but she belonged in heart to the small band of wise and tender grown-ups who can tiptoe into the childhood world. Zozo's inaccessible dream, at this time, was to forsake all those personally near and dear to him and go to live with Amanda and all her children. Of course, he would like to see Mother occasionally—say on Mondays; and Father was good fun when he felt like punching a fellow and tumbling him about. But for a steady thing, give him the house under the Hill.

One of Amanda's children was a newsboy and delivered the afternoon paper. He came always between five and six o'clock, which happily coincided with the hour when Zozo was within doors, cleaned up and prepared for his early supper. Zozo liked to stand behind the long curtains of the living room spying out for the first glimpse. The newsboy, Patrick Aloysius, who was about Zozo's age, rode a bicycle, to the front of which was attached a canvas sack loaded with papers. He wore old clothes, and a cloth cap much too big for him. His skill and dash were enormous. He could ride with both hands off the handlebars; and did so, the while he selected a paper from his canvas sack and twisted it into a hard missile shaped like a boomerang. This he launched at long range, with a noble free gesture and remarkable accuracy, at people's front doors, whistling shrilly through his teeth as a signal. His progression was in fine bold swoops, but he never fell off. Such a devilish kind of a person! He used to grin at Zozo as he hurled the Kirby paper, and then he lopped away on his bike, riding on the pedals quite clear of the seat with the lolling exaggerated swing of the hips. He looked, and

was, entirely happy. He had a moderate neglect that was very satisfactory from his point of view; and in this merry, merry springtime he flopped along, keenly open-spirited, very puppy-energièd, in a good condition for 'most any experience that might come along. He hadn't been damaged; but neither had he been cultivated; he was just a brave weed! When the front window happened to be open, as in this springtime, he generally tried to be funny with the solemn staring little boy within. In Zozo's estimation he led a great life.

And after he had disappeared down the street, everything was so jolly and exciting for just a few minutes: there thronged about the little boy in the window such a swarm of dream comrades, calling, calling to come play with them!

IV

So gradually the stubbornness grew in him. Yet he was not so much sullen as thwarted, undeveloped in many ways. They worked hard on his mind, as though that were the whole—or indeed even a very important part—of growth. They succeeded only in stiffening it, making it rigid, closing it to the invisible influences of real growth. It should have been open-pored, absorptive. Zozo's mind was only a child's mind—a limited thing, even an unimportant thing, as compared to his body and his spirit. It was as though it possessed a sort of valve that automatically limited intake to capacity. By too constant a pressure, too determined an effort to impose on it more than it could stand, they had at last managed to induce in it a spasmodic, instinctive, uncontrollable habit of closing tight before there was any intake at all. It acquired a fatal custom of closing instantly when approached, a kind of self-protection against strain. The boy had not the calibre for what they tried to force on him. He was not particularly backward, either. He had been too early, too vigorously, too unwisely tampered with. Nobody even knew of the existence of that regulating little valve of capacity. Nobody dreamed of the importance of keeping it open, together with the desire for knowledge, the ability to listen, the confidence in approaching new things that goes with its natural functioning.

A state of fallowness was so important to the child's growth, a rest period strengthening his developing faculties, and this was denied him. That would have prevented him from closing up, tightening up, for only in it can come the response of the human

plant to growing impulses. If properly adjusted he should have absorbed his experience of living naturally and eagerly. Some children, of course, are more resistant than was Zozo; instinct is more dominant; they can stand rough handling. This particular boy should have been left more alone in the spaces of childhood. They crowded his childhood spaces.

Some day a great educator who is also a poet will make for parents a little word picture of the nursery of the woods. He will take for it the cool restraining nights, and the warm hastening days, and the strengthening winds, and the dripping, moisture-laden coverlet of spring fogs, and the tender flitting of April sun-rays, and all the kindly helpers who tend Mother Earth's babies when she sends them forth for their brief span of life. It is amazing to see how many nurses a plant has!

But though Zozo's body was scrupulously cared for, and his mind over-cultured, the things of the spirit were utterly denied him; he had no balanced ration of life.

V

Minnie, however, would have resented indignantly the idea that Zozo's ration was the least bit unbalanced. He did laborious and solemn things with dumbbells and a bar that had been inserted in a door jamb; and he took walks in the fresh air, and had the requisite kind and number of baths, and proper food. He was not only well physically, but rather notably well-developed and strong. As for his mind—well, we have had a glimpse of what was being done as to that. Nor, she would have told you triumphantly, was she insensible to his spiritual needs. All pains were being taken there.

Not only did he go to church with the family, and to the following Sunday School, but he had a Bible lesson every other day at home and Minnie made it a point, no matter what her engagements, personally to hear his prayers every night. She saw to all that most dutifully, though without the spark that could illuminate the little ceremony.

Zozo did not mind the prayers. They were something invariably to be done before going to bed, like brushing your teeth. In default of any logical system, the Bible lessons were begun at the beginning with Genesis, and proceeded seriatim from there. As a consequence, they still offered mainly the entertainingly bloody legends of the Old Testament.

Church was a different matter. All Little Falls went to church. It prepared tremendously behind closed doors; and as the fifteen-minute bells began to toll, it emerged simultaneously and with decorous step filled the sidewalks.

There ensued an habitual and standardized endurance test—from Zozo's standpoint, of course. It was so completely standardized that he had long since exhausted its incidental possibilities. The points of interest had been dulled by repeated use. Stained-glass windows were a picture book examined too many times. The saints, the texts, the lambs of God, were all so familiar that they had ceased to exist for him. It was only mildly interesting to see old Deacon Holder march up to the very foot of the pulpit, take a daringly unorthodox wooden chair, and produce his ear trumpet. The faces of the choir were so familiar as to offer no longer a field for speculation. Such things as the singing or the offertory with its passing by the deacons of sublimated corn poppers at the end of sticks, and its clink of coin, had become by repetition merely slight reliefs of pressure. And the interminable talk from the pulpit, words whose occasional conventional sequence he recognized but whose purport was nil, meant simply a necessity for keeping quiet and sitting still. Zozo became an expert at estimating probable time by distant views of a pile of manuscript; he learned the usual order of services by heart. Resignation to the customary he accorded; but for unwarranted and unsportsmanlike interpolations and additions he felt resentment.

After church followed a three-quarter hour of Sunday School downstairs, where were imparted to him and his likes Bible stories, interesting and charming in their fiction quality, conveying vaguely certain basic ideas of a jealous and censorious deity and an ornamental and highly undesirable heaven. Nobody tried to tell him—who was there to tell him?—of the so simple, so easily explained spiritual beauties and meanings. Nobody gave him any idea of immortality as a continuing process of effort and development; of this life as part of an ordered progression; of daily or homely acts, here and now, as vital to the whole, so that one of them neglected will bear compound-interest until paid in performance; that effort of growth determines opportunity, whether here or there; or indeed any simple logical coherent thought that would make immortality a working basis for life. I am not at all sure that such teaching would not have been considered heretical.

In place of this Zozo received plenty of admonition. Most of it, of course, never penetrated even the outer surface. Some few bits stuck, merely because of their unusually spectacular nature; but most of these even—such as turning your other cheek—seemed to Zozo highly impractical. In view of the extreme remoteness of death there appeared to be no urgent necessity of bothering much about it anyway.

The net result was a distaste for church and things formally religious. If by any chance he should in later life continue to go regularly to church, that act would have the same spontaneity and high moral value as any soporific symbol of respectability.

CHAPTER XX

I

THE only grown-up who seemed really to understand was Cousin Jim. It was by instinct rather than by reason that he felt the lad's hunger, that he translated Zozo's grumpy, laconic, shy little confidences to their true meaning. It was by faith rather than works that he did not consider Zozo stupid or sullen or obstinate. By some means of simplicity he could sometimes enter that secret garden of childhood so that dimly he understood.

There was that day in early springtime to begin it all. It was in itself an exciting day, and beneath his brooding black-browed exterior Zozo was stirred. Outside-the-window felt good to him when he leaned out that morning. Zozo reflected on how much nicer the world is outside windows than within—more understandable somehow. Everything was so soft and velvety. There was a kind of warm-damp feeling. For some reason it seemed to be a particularly exciting day. And then there came that old half-forgotten thrill, right through the chest.

Mr. Crabtree, the piano teacher, was due at ten o'clock that morning, but at nine Zozo did an unprecedented and reprehensible thing. He slipped out the side door and ran as fast as his legs could carry him past the house, past the barn, over the fence, and into an old apple orchard across the road—an anomaly in the residential district of Little Falls, fragment of some forgotten old pioneer farm.

Square in the middle of the orchard he ran against Cousin Jim cutting cross lots!

"Where away, young man?" greeted Cousin Jim.

Zozo's spirit fell black as he crawled into his shell. Foiled again! More grown-up! Then some guardian spirit raised his sullen eyes from the ground and he looked into those of Cousin Jim. For a moment the two gazed at each other.

"I dunno," muttered Zozo at last.

But in some manner the real translation got across. Those things do happen to the very simple or the very wise in heart. The same flash of the glory of spring lit both souls simultaneously and blended them in an understanding.

"Why, that's a good idea!" cried Cousin Jim heartily. "Let's do it together!"

He held out his huge and gnarled hand, and after an instant's hesitation Zozo reached up his little fist. Hand-in-hand they turned back through the orchard.

Cousin Jim seemed to be in no doubt whatever as to where to go. He led the way to a corner of the old snake fence and sat down.

"This is the *exact* spot," said he.

He produced a pipe and began to smoke in a sociable silence. Zozo snuggled to him with a sigh of relief: he was not going to be talked to. After an interval Cousin Jim called attention to the little clouds sailing down wind and detailed an anecdote of a man once who took two of them for snowshoes and went snowshoeing all over the sky. Then he went on smoking his pipe.

Everything was so warm and comfortable—no tension at all. Zozo's eyes grew wider and wider. Pretty soon he began to sing to himself. His principles of melody and harmony would not have earned Mr. Crabtree's approval, but his rhythm was good. And Zozo, for once, felt in *tune*. His mind was quite destitute of any coherent thoughts. It was swinging with the rhythm of his song, and the slow sailing of the clouds. Mother Nature had reclaimed her baby. She was teaching quietly and silently the part of him that had been left uneducated. The little shy spirit was creeping out to investigate the universe outside its body-prison—the poor little house-mate that ordinarily had been forced to live like a slavey below the level of the daily consciousness. Now it had come timidly out and was reviving itself. It was growing in the companionship of other things of the spirit. Happiness, comfort, confidence were being reestablished by the magic adjusters.

And then Mother had to go and discover them. She was, as usual, quite exasperated. Mr. Crabtree had been waiting a half hour. She did not know what Zozo could be thinking of! Nor, for that matter, did she know what Cousin Jim was thinking of! Cousin Jim tried to take the blame, and did succeed in appropriating a good part of it, but there seemed to be plenty to go around.

The day was thenceforward full of disgrace, thunder, and tribulation. The offence was not intrinsically great, but it was a First Offence in the line of playing hookey, and gathered unto itself attributes of Rebellion, Inconsiderateness, and the like. But somehow through it all there kept recurring to Zozo the thought of the man who had gone snowshoeing with the two little clouds; and he felt light and buoyant on his feet all day.

II

From that moment Cousin Jim became one of Minnie's regular problems as respects Zozo. His chief crime heretofore had been Bunk-the-dog. Of all the paws-on-your-chest, wriggling, cavorting, puppified nuisances, Bunk-the-dog was the worst because, however you might renounce him and all his works, within two days you had to surrender to his engaging and open-faced candour. Even Minnie and Angélique had done so. After which he went right on scratching at the door, chewing chair legs, leaping extravagantly upward upon all humans, and generally growing up. Minnie capitulated to Bunk-the-dog's charm, to be sure, but she could not help remembering that Cousin Jim had brought her and her furniture and rugs into this condition.

But now Cousin Jim began to appear In Person, as the movies have it. He did not explain his solicitude to himself, nor did it even enter his head that instinctively he felt himself impelled to answer a genuine spiritual call.

"Minnie nags that kid too much," was his comment to himself.

With a shy and gentle persistency, he injected himself and his reprehensibly disordered ways into the situation. Minnie would have liked well enough to keep Cousin Jim "in his place," as she kept Amanda in hers. She approved of Cousin Jim's influence not at all. He was incapable of taking child-training seriously, and was a bad influence on ordinary discipline. But Cousin Jim declined to be sat upon. He was a queer creature that way: for a long time he would slide along in his easy-going fashion and any one could do anything with him; and then all at once he'd make a stand and either one had to let him have his way or be openly brutal to him. Minnie was really very fond of him, beneath her exasperation over his 'orrid 'abits, and she did not want to be that. There was at first much diplomatic skirmishing. Minnie conveyed in indirect fashions of her own the idea that Zozo's formal hours of study and improvement could, obviously, not be

broken into by random visits. Cousin Jim, with no indirection at all, nor any constructive suggestion, pointed out that Zozo was a sort-of-a kind-of-a nephew, and that uncles had rights, however small. Finally it was agreed that the Saturday half-holiday should be Cousin Jim's to do with as he pleased, subject of course to the rules and regulations, and provided he did not interfere the rest of the week. Cousin Jim listened to rules and regulations; then did as he pleased. About the only one he remembered was that Zozo must be home at half-past five. He shrewdly suspected that too much tardiness might be a good excuse to call off the whole show.

III

With all the advantages showered upon him during six days and a half, it was manifestly too silly and discouraging of Zozo to prefer the remaining half day to all the rest; but such was the case. Indeed, the rest of the week was really a period of waiting for Saturday afternoon.

Promptly at half-past one Cousin Jim appeared, sometimes with his old side-bar buggy, but most often afoot. They wandered about their world sociably. There never seemed to be any programme. That was one of the nice things about it; one never knew what might not turn up.

It did not matter. You see, Cousin Jim was a *real fellow*. He understood; and he could explain things sensibly; and at times he could even give a twist to some of those horrible home duty things that made them look good. There was the Natural History Book, for example. Uncle had presented that, in two morocco bound volumes. It was by a first-rate naturalist, but unfortunately it was written consciously for children, and was therefore obviously and disgustingly simplified and archly playful in its didactics. It had a wonderful binding and some very interesting pictures, and it cost like blazes; but its letter text was about as exciting as a piece of tatting. It Aimed to Instruct. Zozo looked at all the pictures twice, sampled the text once, and was through. It was obvious that he had not done justice to Uncle's expensive gift, and that he did not intend to do so. Therefore, he was required to read five pages as a daily task. Zozo did a laborious sum in short division on the basis of 523 pages.

Nevertheless, one of the Saturdays—the Saturday he had the

very sore thumb—he happened, just happened, to mention the Natural History Book to Cousin Jim. He had said nothing of it before through some obscure notion as to the discourtesy of unnecessarily mentioning disagreeable things. The sore thumb was much more important. It was the first sore thumb he had ever possessed, and he suffered cruelly and debated whether he would be able to survive. He wanted to expatiate on the affliction, but Cousin Jim's infantile attention was caught by the Natural History Book, and Zozo had to postpone the more important subject until he could have satisfied Cousin Jim's curiosity a bit.

To his surprise he found that quite a little of those five pages per diem had made some sort of an impression on him. And to his still greater surprise the things were interesting, now that Cousin Jim asked about them. In five minutes the rôles were reversed: Zozo was asking all the questions. Cousin Jim had a busy time.

"What is instinct?" was one of Zozo's demands: "why do birds migrate; how do they know where to go; how do they know how to build nests; have they teachers; who teaches animals to hibernate; are there schools for beaver builders; who keeps the bees busy; are there any lazy ants; are there any rules about the stores of nuts the squirrels put away for winter; can any one eat all he wants to at any time, or what——?"

Cousin Jim satisfied these and other queries. There came a pause while Zozo thought it over.

"I wish I had instincts," he sighed at last.

"Why?" demanded Cousin Jim.

"It would be awful handy, I wouldn't have to study so hard."

"Well," said Cousin Jim reasonably, "you can have if you want to. It's just a matter of learning secrets."

"Secrets!" cried Zozo. "How?"

"Same way all the birds and beasts and flowers and things do. You watch them awhile and find out. Watch that bird there."

He pointed to a vireo busily and methodically examining a tree for insects. The little bird, bright-eyed and intent, moved systematically along the branch, peering under each leaf, along each twig, moving with quick staccato flirts, entirely and single-mindedly absorbed in the one object of its quest. Then suddenly, as they watched, it fluttered to the top of the tree and began, full-throated, to utter its wandering, quavering, liquid song, its

little body quivering with the ecstasy of the performance. It stopped; sat motionless for a moment; preened its feathers for another moment, and then with a swish was back in the heart of the tree, again busily searching its insects.

"I didn't see anything," reported Zozo, disappointedly.

"Just the same there was a secret there," said Cousin Jim, "and it's a secret most people haven't got. It's not being so busy looking for things to eat that you can't stop and listen, and sniff the air way down deep, and watch which way the clouds are going, and shut your eyes and feel excited and happy because of all the things buzzing around you. That's a pretty good secret."

"I don't think much of it," stated Zozo.

"Well, if you remember to do it, you'll think much of it. That's the first step. If you are never too busy to do that, by and by you will learn lots of secrets of squirrels and rabbits and ducks and beavers, for that is precisely the way *they* go to school. And a very nice system it is: no end of fun. The better you get at it, the more you can find out about bigger and bigger secrets. But you must *never* be too busy to listen and look and sniff and feel. But mostly you must feel friendly." Cousin Jim smiled down at the small absorbed face. "Now," said he briskly, "shut your eyes tight and hold your nose." As soon as Zozo had done so, Cousin Jim clapped both his own hands over the child's ears.

"There," he said, after a half-minute, removing his hands, "that will do. Tell me, what was happening out here in the orchard?"

"How do I know!" cried Zozo, aggrieved.

"Didn't you know *anything* about it?"

"No. Yes, I did: the air was warm."

"Good for you!" cried Cousin Jim heartily, "you had one little door open, didn't you? But all your other doors were tight shut. Think of living in a house without windows or doors or chimneys or any way of getting out at all!"

"I wouldn't like that."

"Of course you wouldn't! But that's exactly what you will do, unless you watch out. You live in a house with five doors, you know; only you can easily step out through them at any time."

"There are six doors, if you count the cellar one," he announced at length, "and I can't go out except when Mother lets me."

"This is the house I mean," laughed Cousin Jim, punching him in the ribs. "Your own body is the house that you live in, and your five senses are the doors."

He clapped his hands over the small boy's eyes.

"What's going on in front of you in the grass?"

"How can I tell unless you let me look?" Zozo pointed out a little resentfully.

"See!" cried Cousin Jim, removing his hands. "Now if you'd had that door wide open, you would have been out there in the grass with that beetle. That's how you go out that door. But so long as you didn't *look*, there wasn't any beetle as far as you were concerned, was there?"

"Do it again!" demanded Zozo.

But this time Cousin Jim clapped his hands over Zozo's ears.

"What do you hear?" he shouted.

"Nothing, except when you yelled."

Cousin Jim dropped his hands.

"Now?" he asked.

Zozo was astonished. All of a sudden there was so much to hear—the birds singing, the breeze rustling, the chirp of insects, the hum of bees, the faint released undertones of vital earth and growth.

"See?" said Cousin Jim. "You had that door shut; now it is open and you have gone outside through it. That's what you want to do. Play through all your doors. You want to be always thinking to yourself: my, that's soft and nice; it feels good! Or: It has such pretty colours and it's so *interesting* to look at! Or: It tastes so good, it's *fun* to eat that! Or: I wonder how that smells? And when you go out through all the doors, why where are you and where's your body? You've left it behind, haven't you? You're really out with the fine sights and sounds and smells and things. And you don't care very *much* whether you've got a sore thumb or not—— Aha!" shouted Cousin Jim in triumph, "what did I tell you? You'd forgotten every bit about it! You've been out through your doors and left it behind!"

Zozo grinned. He could not deny it.

"You remember that," advised Cousin Jim. "It's only when you shut all the doors, one after the other, and huddle down inside your body, thinking and thinking, all crouched down inside, that you get a cramp, you get poisoned air, and you get all stiff and stupid in it. No, sir! You take my tip: get outside your

body all you can, get out your doors. You've got to have a house; got to have a body. But you don't want to live in them much."

He gazed kindly at the small boy at his side.

"My Lord!" he cried. "You poor silly people! What do you suppose your senses were given you for besides to keep you from falling down!"

Zozo knew this was not meant for him. Cousin Jim often used him as a target to talk at. Strangely enough Zozo liked it, though he understood very little of it. He did not get the word-sense, but he got the feel of it somehow.

IV

For example, there was the week he got the kite. Cousin Jim had a streak of talking that day. His subject was obscure, though at times Zozo discerned it as he might discern momentarily outlines in a shifting fog. They were tramping in a field near Burton Lake. For some time there had been a sociable silence.

"Ever think how many relatives you've got?" asked Cousin Jim, abruptly.

Zozo in his deliberate fashion considered this.

"There's you and Uncle, and Uncle Freeman, and Father and Mother," he enumerated.

"And hundreds more," stated Cousin Jim calmly.

Zozo looked astonished.

"It is," said Cousin Jim with solemnity, "on account of Usness. U-s, us, n-e-double s, ness—Usness," he spelled. "You see, you are related to everything in the world. That's why you like things, you know, because there's some part of you that's related to some part of it—first cousin, or something like that. It may be only a little tiny piece of you that's relatives to a tiny piece of it, and then you only like it a little. Or maybe there's a whole lot of you related to a whole lot of it, and then you just love it. Let's sit down and talk sense. Here's a good log."

They perched on the log in the warm sunshine, while the breeze that had ruffled the blue waters of the lake stole across the short grass and breathed softly on them. Cousin Jim seemed in no hurry to talk sensibly. He lighted his pipe with great deliberation and gazed relishingly about him.

"You know, when you get that idea," he said at last, "you can have a lot of fun. You can go around finding out just exactly

where you're related to things. That's better than being a stranger in the world, isn't it? You can go around and call out to each other. You can call out to a fat old cloud you see up there, 'Hullo there! We're related to each other.' That's fun; and it's true, too. Do you want to know why?"

"Tell me," urged Zozo contentedly.

"Well, for one thing because it is so free on the wind and can sail and sail away; and there's a little piece of you that is free that way, too. Haven't you ever felt like a cloud, inside, sailing and sailing away, all swelled up and excited? I'll bet you have!

"And then there's the big tree, and all the little birds under it in the nest; and you like them, and you say to them, 'I claim something in you as me and mine.' And when you feel the wind on your cheek and the warm sun on your back and enjoy them, it's because they are calling to things in you that are the wind and the sun. That's the way to go around the world, welcoming things and exchanging courtesies with them, rather than being a lot of hard-shelled old grouches like some people who won't say hullo to their own relatives."

"Tell me some more relatives," demanded Zozo.

"Well," mused Cousin Jim, "there are the stars, of course, but they are pretty distantly related. Personally, I'll confess to you, I can't do more than respect and admire them. But each fellow has to go around picking out his own relatives. That's where the fun comes in. You try things and see how many of them claim you, and which are your near relatives and which are your distant ones. After you get acquainted with them you'll want to join them. You'll want to whistle with the wind, you'll want to swish with the water, you'll want to sing lullabies with the moon, you'll want to be loud with the thunder, you'll want to cr-e-e-p into small places, and you'll want to just soar into big ones. You'll be all tingling and glowing with the warmth of the sun, and you'll want to go where the cold lives. It's great fun, Usness."

He smoked vigorously to get his pipe alight again.

"That's the joke! It's fun, and at the same time you're learning something. Remember when Mother made us keep Bunk-the-dog on a chain? Wasn't he funny? He was so mournful and reproachful, even though he had a fine soft warm kennel, and a panful of food, and nice cold water to drink. Want to know why? Because he couldn't use his natural sniffing dogginess.

Same way with people. Everybody wants to sniff around and explore and dig a few holes. Can't while they are on chains. When we work in freedom we sniff around and abounding things pour into us. Then something's started—something's growing.—Don't know what I'm talking about, do you?"

"No, sir; but I like it," said Zozo truthfully.

Cousin Jim laughed and arose, knocking out his pipe. They plodded across the field, unhitched the horse, and drove home. Instead of delivering him at once to Angélique, Cousin Jim led him mysteriously around the house to where stood an empty cage that had once held a robin.

"Now," said Cousin Jim, "I have a job for you. I want you to come here every day and stand in front of this cage and try to think you're a robin and have always lived in it, and that one day the door has been left open and you've got out. I want you to try to think *just* how it would feel, and what would be the first things you would do when you got out and had got over being scared about it."

"Like when I got up after I had the measles!" supplemented Zozo.

"That's it! Well, you do that every day for five minutes until next Saturday, and then you tell me about it—just how you feel and what you would do. If you do that, I've got a present for you."

"What is it?" demanded Zozo.

Cousin Jim considered.

"It's a kite," he announced, "but it really isn't from me. It's from Bunk-the-dog for letting him off the chain." He glanced at his watch. "Well," said he, "I'm afraid it's time to go." He surveyed his small charge critically. "Done pretty well to-day," he congratulated himself. "Damage negligible. Shoes a little muddy, perhaps——"

He looked after the sturdy figure a trifle sadly, the little human puppy going back to its chain, the too-brief playtime of the spirit over—impossible to sniff and explore and dig holes.

v

There were, of course, occasions when it rained on a Saturday afternoon. Zozo could never understand why this should happen, when there were six other days available; and he never got over a little resentment at the thoughtless injustice of it. At first

such times seemed destined to be lost completely; but Cousin Jim gave battle to any proposals that might work against his complete avuncular privilege for that half-day. It was quite a battle, too; for Minnie happened to be in one of her "states"; a "state" being a general term to describe nervous contractions and irritations over snagging responsibilities. There were times, especially when she gave way to it, when disagreeable biting annoyances fastened on her with teeth so that the utter absorption and rancour of it all attracted recollections of all past similar snags and rawnesses, until she had collected them all in her mind and brooded over them and thoroughly poisoned herself, getting tighter and tighter and more acidly concentrated. To herself she appeared to be overwhelmed with too many duties and responsibilities. The mere suggestion of an added one seemed more than she could bear. She told this to Cousin Jim. She pointed out that the task of getting Zozo ready to go out in the wet, and the task of seeing him properly changed when he returned home was too much. Cousin Jim remained entirely unimpressed and astonishingly firm. He refused flatly to stay and play with Zozo in his own nursery; he refused to relinquish his Saturday afternoon. He waited calmly for the exasperated acquiescence he knew must come; and he carried Zozo off to his own funny little house.

Cousin Jim's house was not as prolific of astonishing objects as was Uncle's, but it was more practical. You could play with most of what you found—with all, in fact, except the guns. But you could stare even at them; and it is better to stare at one gun than to handle many ivory chessmen. Zozo stood by the gun rack as respectful and adoring as a puppy by the dining-room table. He knew the name and characteristics of every weapon in the rack; and he particularly liked the odour of sewing-machine oil with which his deities were anointed. Cousin Jim had promised that on his tenth birthday he should begin to shoot with a Flobert. That was almost at hand. There were a number of pretty good books at Cousin Jim's, too; and Jack and Jill, the beautiful black and white setters. But on the whole the material resources were nothing astonishing. Cousin Jim was the attraction, and as long as he was there to chat with, all was well.

But one afternoon Cousin Jim did not prove to be very companionable. He turned out what he had, and then abandoned Zozo in favour of a table and papers. Zozo was too accustomed to having his minutes marked for him to go very long on his own.

He was soon bored and at a loss; ending at the window, kicking the wainscoting, and staring out into the steadily falling rain.

"What's the matter?" asked Cousin Jim unexpectedly. "Can't you find anything to do?"

"No," replied Zozo, a little sullenly.

That was a question to which he was thoroughly accustomed. The next grown-up remark would be to the effect that that was very strange with all the beautiful and interesting things provided—that *most* little boys would be only too happy——

Cousin Jim, however, said nothing of the kind. He rose from the table, stretched his long figure, and yawned.

"It is pretty dull," said he. "Let's light the fire and sit in the leather chair. Here, you can light it."

The privilege of striking and applying the match was moderately appreciated. Cousin Jim had seated himself in the leather chair and had lighted his pipe. The fresh voluminous smoke rose briskly, to come to rest in long striated bands just below the ceiling. Jack and Jill stretched, yawned, and advanced with dignity to flop down before the new blaze. Zozo clambered to Cousin Jim's lap.

"Going to tell a story?" he enquired.

"Let's just talk," suggested Cousin Jim.

But he seemed in no hurry to begin. That was often the way with Cousin Jim, so Zozo was not impatient.

"If a magician were to come along and offer you just one wish, what would you wish for?" demanded Cousin Jim, abruptly. "Only one wish, mind you!"

Zozo entered the realm of fascinating but inconclusive speculation. Finally he left it, temporarily, involved in a bewilderment of choice.

"What would you wish for?" he countered.

"A keen appetite," replied Cousin Jim, promptly.

Zozo turned to stare up into his face. No: he was not joking.

"Oh, shucks!" said he. "Everybody's got *that*!"

"No," said Cousin Jim. "That's where you're wrong. Everybody hasn't. They may have a keen appetite for food, but my kind of an appetite is different: it takes in everything. And their appetite is all gone once they have eaten, don't forget that!"

"Of course," said Zozo, puzzled. "Is this grown-up talk you can't 'splain?"

"Not *any*!" cried Cousin Jim, emphatically, "Secret, Zozo:

there isn't any grown-up talk that can't be explained. That's a bluff. But about this appetite I would wish for: You know how you feel when the Christmas dinner is late, and you've been saving up for it, and the turkey and the gravy are in front of you? Well, I want to feel that way about everything all the time. I want to feel that way about it when I start out for a walk. I want to feel that way about walking itself. I want to feel that way about climbing a tree. I want to feel that way when I swing. I want to feel that way about everything worth doing—just ready to fall with hunger on it!"

"The way I feel about the guns," supplied Zozo.

Cousin Jim chuckled.

"Exactly! Well, you know, there's a magic about that kind of an appetite. It makes you grow and grow, and by and by you grow to be a giant. And then I'd stride around the earth, stepping across beautiful countries, being as hungry as ice cream for snow-mountain tops, and I'd be consumed-thirsty for bathing and drinking in rivers; and I'd keep going and taking big breaths and feeling excited and hungry about everything until I'd sweated and washed away all the laziness and criss-crossness in me."

"Then what would you do?" begged Zozo, his eyes shining.

"Then? Oh, then I guess I'd put to sea and I'd hunt for an island, a little island, small enough so I could get personally acquainted with everybody on it; and I'd start in making everybody on it keenly hungry for things, too. And when that was done, we'd *all* start out to sea to find a bigger island with more people——"

He came to a sudden stop. "Glory be! what do you think!" he cried. "It's stopped raining. Let's see what we can find in the orchard."

They went out into a glittering world; and in the orchard after much search they found two ripe apples and plucked them. They were smooth and shining, and the sides next the leaves were wet. They crunched nicely, and were white and glistening inside.

"Always eat around the worms," advised Cousin Jim. "—I'd do that sort of thing if I were a free-feeling giant."

When it came time to go home there were muddy and wet feet. It was only then that Cousin Jim recalled the imperative sequence of wet grass and rubbers. Too late now. He took Zozo into the house and tried, not very successfully, to repair damages. That was always one of the great problems, the repair

of damages. Zozo invariably came home from Cousin Jim's dirty or cut or bruised or something else in the way of great experience. Minnie and Angélique did not look on it quite in that light; but it was a great experience just the same. All the rest of the week they harped on how he must in all circumstances "act like a little man," and always be a gentleman, and courageous, and that sort of thing; but they never by any possibility gave him a chance to mash his finger with a hammer and see how he was going to stand the pain and how he was not going to mash it next time. How could he *learn* what they were talking about? If you breathe in, you must breathe out. The poor child had no outlets, no chance to strengthen his fibre by his own experience.

Cousin Jim surveyed him thoughtfully. Ordinarily Zozo was allowed to walk home the few blocks alone.

"I guess I better go home with you to-day and explain," Cousin Jim decided.

VI

The best times were in the old orchard back of the house in the summer, when the great heats made vigorous excursions undesirable. Then they sat on the warm dry earth beneath the shade of the trees, and listened to the droning summer noises while Bunk-the-dog, flat on his side, panted noisily, dripped from an extended pink tongue, and rolled his eyes at them companionably. Then Cousin Jim, on persuasion, might tell a story. There was one that particularly fascinated Zozo. He often demanded its repetition, and Cousin Jim would always repeat it. That was strange, for Cousin Jim was little given to repetitions, however earnestly sought. The first telling of it was fragmentary, owing to the fact that it was not begun until too late in the afternoon.

"Once upon a time," Cousin Jim began, "there was a poor man who found that he could rise out of his body, leaving it asleep under a tree. Then, when he left, he always felt a little chilly, so he always put on a gorgeous deep-toned garment, something like the Persian rug in the front hall, only it was very soft and light and like velvet to touch. When you looked at it close to, you saw it was a design of many patterns, but when you stood off from it a little it was just blended and changeable to a different colour each way you looked at it. Oh, it was a beautiful, *beautiful* garment; and the funny part of it is that it was so warm and

comfortable that the minute he put it on he forgot it. He didn't think of his clothes any more at all!

"Well, when he had it on he thought he'd start off to explore; because he found that he was in a bigger world. It was so much bigger than ours that ours looked like a circus tent. He couldn't make out at first whether there was a church organ playing, or whether it was the wind in the trees. And there was a grand flame-coloured sunset going on, though the sun was high in the heavens and it was not dark. That was queer. It was all flame-coloured, shot with blue."

"Oh, *shucks!*" cried Zozo, which was not a commentary on the story, but on the imminence of Angélique, watch in hand, and intentions as to dressing for dinner. A little later, coming downstairs appropriately clean and spick, Zozo unexpectedly found Cousin Jim still there, sitting on the front porch, enjoying the first cool of the evening. He proved to be very mysterious under questioning. Zozo learned that the world the man went to was a secret world; that each had to find it for himself because each person did different things in it; that if he would decide just exactly what he wanted to do if he got there, perhaps later Cousin Jim might be able to tell him how to do it. It was awfully big and beautiful, but you had to think about it a *long* time before you found your way.

Cousin Jim provided these scraps of information as brief replies, delivered between puffs at his pipe, in answer to questions.

"I forgot to tell you," he vouchsafed at last, "that the beautiful coloured thing, the cloak, made him warm and strong and not afraid of anything. And the best part of it was that it never tore or got dirty. He could do *anything* in it! And he was invisible to lots of people when he had it on. Only very wise grown-ups and children could see him—and dogs."

"My, I'd like to have one!" cried Zozo.

Cousin Jim arose, preparing to depart.

"Well, you can, if you want to," he assured. "Just think about it long enough."

Zozo must have thought about it, for the first thing he demanded the following Saturday was the rest of the story about the Man who could Leave his Body.

Cousin Jim lay on his back and put his feet against an apple tree.

"Well," he continued from this inverted position, "did you

ever have such a cold in your head that you couldn't taste your favourite dessert or smell anything good? There seemed to be something similar the matter in that new world. It was all very beautiful to look at, but when he wanted to explore it he found he couldn't get near it. There seemed to be something lacking; it seemed to him that he had forgotten to bring something along that would make it all right, but for the life of him he couldn't think what it was. He thought about his dog with nice friendly waggy tail and cocky ears, and he worried a little about who would give him something to eat. He wished he had brought him along, for it was rather lonesome.

"And at that the foggy feeling that had gathered about him got a little brighter, cleared up a little; and he laughed because he felt so queer and tingly, especially when he thought about the dog."

"What was the dog's name?" demanded Zozo.

"His name was Mike. The man wanted very much to move around, but he couldn't because he had always been in the habit of going to sleep whenever he felt the least bit sleepy, any hour of the day; and now part of him was sleepy, and the tingly part of him couldn't get that part of him to budge an inch. You see he was quite unused to *making* himself do things.

"He wished he knew how to go to work; and that, let me tell you, was a funny way for *him* to feel! That is, part of him wished it. That part wanted to dig big shovelfuls of earth and throw them way up in the air, as though they were not heavy at all; and the other part of him wouldn't budge an inch. How he did wish he could boss himself! There he was, so beautifully dressed up, feeling so new; and in such a fascinating new country; and at the same time he was just rooted as fast as the tree he had left his body under! Men were intended to walk and climb mountains, not to stay in one place like trees."

"What happened next?" demanded Zozo, after Cousin Jim had permitted a long pause, during which he stared into the depths of the treetop.

"An idea came to him. He thought somebody suggested it, and yet when he looked around he couldn't see anybody. The idea was that it wasn't much use trying to go exploring unless he had some sort of outfit. So he thought he'd better go back and get one. Then, too, he was worried about the dog. He didn't know what kind of an outfit to get, but he decided for one thing he must have something besides himself, something to enjoy

things with him and laugh with him. He thought he'd better wake himself up under the tree and shake himself and make himself climb it, just to see if he couldn't uproot himself by holding on *tight* to the top branches and looking around for more trees, so he wouldn't be lazy.

"So very sadly he took off his *beautiful* garment, and then was so chilly and queer feeling that he was glad enough to crawl back into his body."

"Did he get his outfit and go back? What did he find?" begged Zozo.

"The first thing was a terrible fight with his body. It was so heavy to move; and, strangely enough, it seemed to have a stupid will of its own. It did *not* want to get up and climb that tree! And it really *did* seem like rather a comfortable thing to do, just to snooze. But suddenly the man remembered the feel of the deep-coloured clothes, and the sunset, and the dog, and the way he wanted to laugh and go on and on. And he gave himself an awful heave, and he made himself take hold of the first branch and chin himself up! He climbed 'way to the top of the tree; and after that he felt so warm and bumptious that he went swimming with the dog."

Cousin Jim cocked one eye aloft.

"Do you think you could chin yourself on that branch there?

—Let's see you do it."

After which the long lank man and the chubby boy solemnly stood on their heads together. Very much flushed with the heat, they dropped prone.

"Is that the end of the story?" asked Zozo.

"No," replied Cousin Jim.

"Finish it."

"That is not the end, but that is as far as I know. I do not know whether the man found all his outfit for exploring that country or not. The last I heard of him he was still trying. Of course, he was bound to go there sometime; we all will."

"Oh, will we? Sure?"

"Certain-sure. That is what we do when we die. We leave our bodies and go into that country. Only then we do not come back as this man did. But it is very important, as you can see, to get your outfit together, so you won't have to stand rooted like a tree for a long time after you get there when you will want so much to explore."

Zozo was silent for some time.

"What do you have to have for an outfit?" he asked at length.

"That," submitted Cousin Jim, "is an exceedingly difficult question to answer; because, you see, each person has to have a different outfit. I only know a little of a few things you've got to practise before you can even begin to look. You've got to practise Usness quite a lot, and you've got to be unselfish quite a lot, and, oh, you've got to laugh a whole lot, and you've got to laugh hardest at yourself and your troubles. Then you've got to get that hungry feeling for things I told you about."

"You said I might go there some day," Zozo reminded him.

"And so you may. It is a magic country, but it is there waiting, once you find the secret. You can't go into that country until you can boss yourself, and you can't go until you have thought hard of every single thing you would like to have there; every single thing. You see, it's a magic country. The minute you think *hard* about a thing, presto! there it actually is in that country! And if you don't think hard about it, it isn't there at all. It's pretty good fun to make your own country that way. You better begin!"

Cousin Jim puffed forth two enormous clouds.

"Remember; once you've thought hard of anything, there it is!—whether you want it there or not! Better be careful how you think about disagreeable things!"

Thus far always the story followed invariable lines. Thenceforward it became a game. Together they decided what next would be advisable to place in the new country. Together they searched through the past week to discover what Zozo had consciously or unconsciously placed therein. There were at times some very dismaying undesirables.

"Never mind them," comforted Cousin Jim. "There they are, to be sure, and I don't know how we can get them out, except one way: crowd them out. Make so many nice things that there isn't room for them. Ever notice that's the way plants fight? They don't bite and scratch—they just grow bigger and finer until there isn't room for the other fellow.—Remember, when you feel like laughing your roots come up easier!"

VII

Poor Cousin Jim; he had not very much chance. One half-day a week against the routine of authority! He offered what he had.

A great deal of the time his talk was away over the boy's head, and especially was it beyond his rather limited imaginative capacity. Nevertheless, he spun a perhaps bewildering but certainly fascinating richness. It released the child's heart, undid contractions, opened up the sensitive spirit to reception of those unseen modelling forces which answer individual needs as automatically as chemical substances are attracted in affinity. But his effort was so curtailed. What chance could it have against ambitions so eager and so resplendent?

CHAPTER XXI

I

BUT Zozo did not shoot the Flobert rifle on his tenth birthday for the simple reason that he celebrated it far from home. Mr. Kirby won his point when he made up his mind that the time had come to do so.

"I have decided to go abroad," he announced his intention to Marcel. "We shall start in April. Ah, that does not displease you, eh? You will enquire the sailings and make all arrangements and reservations. I wish adjoining cabins. One I shall occupy, yourself with my grand-nephew will occupy the other."

"Monsieur Zozo accompanies us?"

"Naturally—since he occupies the adjoining cabin," said Mr. Kirby drily, mounting his eyeglass. "I do not wish to find you tedious, Marcel."

Marcel recovered himself. "No, monsieur. And for Angélique?"

"I shall not take Angélique. The boy is old enough to cut loose from apron strings."

"May I be permitted to express my surprise that Madame agrees?"

"I have not consulted Madame."

Marcel looked doubtful, but said nothing. Mr. Kirby paused for a moment, then laid his hand over a paper on the table by his side.

"I have decided, Marcel, to make my will before starting. It is here. I have made my grand-nephew my heir."

"I am gratified that Monsieur is satisfied."

"I did not say I was satisfied. But it has seemed to me, in view of the vicissitudes of travel, not to mention my own advanced age, unfair not to make provision for untoward circumstances. It is, one might say, an insurance against injustice. On my return, should I so desire, this can be destroyed, and the situation return to its present status."

Marcel bowed.

"Bring me the ink and a pen. There, that will do. We shall need two witnesses. Call Jean: you will do for the other."

"Pardon, monsieur," interposed Marcel respectfully but hastily, as the old gentleman dipped his pen, "but perhaps Monsieur has not been informed of the fact that Monsieur must sign in the presence of both witnesses, and that they must sign also in the presence of all."

Mr. Kirby mounted his eyeglass again and examined Marcel, who bore the scrutiny calmly.

"No, I did not know that," he said after a moment. "Call Jean."

"And, monsieur, one more thing. Any one who benefits by the will cannot sign as witness. It makes all of no force."

"Well, 'pon my word, Marcel," observed Mr. Kirby, "you seem to be extraordinarily well informed on the subject of wills! Well, why not?" he conceded after a pause. "It is only as I myself would do. I may say, Marcel, that your hint is correct. You are rather unusually incompetent as a witness."

"Thank you, monsieur."

"Call—but the servants, too, are all remembered. Never mind."

He folded the paper slowly and arose.

"My coat, Marcel; and the team. I will see to it at once."

But when Marcel held the coat ready he stood for some moments in a brown study.

"Yes," he muttered to himself, "I think this wise—yes, I am sure of it. After all, it can always be revoked."

Marcel, his Gallic nature singing within him at the direct confirmation of his hopes, for the first time in his service committed an error of tact. It was only exuberance.

"I hope Monsieur does not mean on my account," said he, jestingly.

"On account of anybody who disappoints me," rasped Mr. Kirby without looking at him.

II

He lost no time in breaking the news to Minnie. The usual hour of his almost daily consultations with her had not yet arrived, but he had her informed over the telephone that he would wait on her. Minnie was about to go out, but sent word to

break her engagement. She did not like to do this, and a little wave of exasperation swept through her at the necessity.

For in the years the mutual attitude of these two conspirators had defined itself. In spite of old Mr. Kirby's suave courtesy, in spite of his attention to her ideas, in spite of his apparent deference to her opinion and her status as parent, it clearly became evident to Minnie that in reality he was giving orders which she was expected to obey. Only when her ideas happened to coincide with his were they finally accepted. At first she used to put up a fight, but she soon found it was useless. Old Mr. Kirby was as unyielding as concrete. Minnie had a plain choice before her; she must do as he said, or the experiment would end then and there. Minnie submitted perforce, and with the best outward grace of which she was capable; but she raged internally. At first merely annoyed, she passed rapidly from resentment to an active though impotent hostility. This was the more intense because she strongly suspected that the old gentleman saw it and was secretly and cynically amused at it. But in outward seeming all was deference and wreathed smiles between them.

After he had properly executed the will in Bob Post's office, old Mr. Kirby drove around to keep his telephoned appointment. He attacked the matter with what was for him brutal directness. His orders were very nearly expressed as such.

"I came this afternoon somewhat early," said he, "to submit what seems to me a matter of the first importance. The boy is now just short of ten years old. He is, in my opinion, old enough to be submitted with advantage to the modelling influences that exist only in the older countries. He is ripe to go abroad; and in my opinion he should remain abroad for at least one year."

Minnie gasped. The proposal was a complete surprise to her, and she required a moment for orientation.

"It's a new idea to me," she said. "I would have to think it over."

"I assure you I consider it quite essential," stated Mr. Kirby.

She looked at him with some surprise. Never before had he so carelessly buttoned the velvet glove.

"Nevertheless," she pointed out, with some exasperation that welled up in her despite her best effort to hold it down, "even should it prove to be essential, there are ways and means to consider."

"Ways and means are matters that concern only myself," he rejoined, "you may divest your mind of that consideration."

Minnie's cheeks displayed round red spots and her eyes flashed. Only with the greatest difficulty did she control herself. It was one of those unfortunate occasions when cumulative effects focus their forces; a dangerous moment. Minnie was appalled at the upsurge within her of a thousand little past inhibited revolts united into one. To gain time she moved across the room and rang the bell for tea. She was frightened at herself. For a brief terrifying moment she had stood in peril of throwing over the future, and the past, in one brief gust of sincerity.

"There is Fred," she pointed out sweetly, when she had turned back, once more mistress of herself. "I very much doubt whether he would allow you to make ways and means your consideration; and I am quite positive it would be impossible to hoodwink him."

"Fred," said Mr. Kirby bluntly, "is not my affair. Fred is your affair. You must manage Fred." He leaned forward and tapped the ferrule of his stick twice sharply against the floor. "I expect this," said he.

Minnie looked at his dapper correct figure, his cynical and sophisticated old face, with something near fear. He was leaning forward, both hands clasped over his stick, his keen eyes boring unwaveringly into hers, his pallid mask-like face with its waxed moustache, its heavy white eyebrows, its white goatee, thrust forward at her out of the twilight of the drawing room. He seemed to answer her thought.

"Madame," said he, "I appear to you to be giving orders. As a matter of fact, I am making a request, proffering a suggestion, offering an opportunity, perhaps assuring a whole future. I am surprised that you do not find it an irresistible combination."

A pause fell on them while they stared into each other's eyes. How long it lasted neither could have told. It was the culminating point. Here Minnie either asserted her independence—at what cost she could only guess—or became definitely the wholly acquiescent second to this dominating old man. There could be no doubt.

"I shall try to arrange it," she faltered at last, and dropped her eyes lest he should see what blazed in their depths.

At once old Mr. Kirby's customary suavity returned. They planned with more apparent amicability. Minnie took it for

granted that she was included in the party, but was soon undeceived.

"If this were a pleasure trip I should welcome the suggestion," Uncle assured her, "but to my view it is primarily educational and formulative. Precisely at this age it is best that a boy should for a period be removed from feminine influence. It is not that I decry feminine influence—at any age," he chuckled wickedly, "but there should be interims for the attainment of perspective. I shall appoint to him Marcel to valet and care for him."

"Not even Angélique!" cried Minnie.

"Certainly not Angélique," repeated Mr. Kirby firmly.

Tea was brought in. Mr. Kirby took advantage of the interruption to change the course of the conversation. He became as charming as only he could be; but he managed to avoid the old subject. Shortly he left. Minnie stared after his carriage. She felt imprisoned, trapped. She dared not think. Only by keeping the hatches tight battened down could she prevent the mutineers from taking possession of her whole being.

CHAPTER XXII

I

SO ZOZO disappeared for the formative year, and the old Kirby mansion was closed and shuttered. Little Falls appeared to survive the shock of this double bereavement. Indeed, some ribald and unregenerate persons seemed to think that a holiday had been declared and that for a brief period everybody might "act natural." Now that these twin luminaries had temporarily abandoned the heavens other stars were becoming visible.

At first the separation seemed unbearable to Minnie, for she was a woman of strong maternal instincts, even though they were sometimes expressed in queer ways. But she was upheld by the feeling that she was doing the best possible thing for the boy. And after all, though she was homesick for him, she was a woman of many occupations.

On an average of every seven days she received three documents. One was a formal two sheets in Mr. Kirby's angular copper-plate handwriting, reporting all well in general, and proffering courtesies. It was evidently merely a proper convention, for the real report came from Marcel. This was always sufficiently voluminous to instruct Minnie in all possible details of plan and movement. The very shops visited were mentioned. Marcel was proud of his English and he had specific instructions from Monsieur. It was fortunate, for if it had not been for him, Minnie would have known little of the trip itself. Zozo's productions were marvels to be expected from a boy of ten, conscientiously filling the four pages at tremendous cost of recollection and invention by a brain that pen and ink totally bereft of ideas. She learned that he had spilled gravy on the table at Florence; and had seen a man with a long cape in Rome. These laborious epistles tickled her hugely, of course, and her heart warmed within her. But in none of the letters of either of the men could she find one word in expression of how satisfactorily things were going.

II

It was very strange how many things seemed to be going on in the world, even when the main Focussing Point of all legitimate effort had been withdrawn. Freeman, for example. He was beginning to find life unexpectedly complicated. Just as he had settled into a nice fat routine, things began to stir him up.

The past ten years had really not done Freeman a lot of good. He had attained, however, a complete self-satisfaction. To be sure he still worked in the bank at a salary only slightly larger than the one on which he had started; but his outside business, as he regarded it, had increased until he had become quite a financier. He took the *Wall Street Journal* and an analytical financial weekly; kept a private set of books, and a dope sheet of investments. Little by little Freeman began to have considerable respect for himself as an astute trader.

He was still darkly good-looking; he dressed in exquisite taste; his social popularity, while more accustomed, was undimmed; he dwelt in comfort with his Japanese servant; and he was prospering financially. The latter consideration gave him the most pleasure. It was a proof that he could play with his left hand, negligently, so to say, the game these "hustling business men" thought should take all a man's time. Canby, who was now the city's most prominent broker, told him he had a genius for it. Freeman was sweetly unaware how many geniuses for it Canby had discovered in Little Falls.

There was one imponderable, however, that even Freeman's genius had overlooked. He had conducted his financial career on a rising market. But it is a sad fact that markets cannot continue to rise for ever, though that fact is invariably overlooked until it impends. Zozo and Mr. Kirby made their foreign pilgrimage in 1897. Any student of financial history will tell you what happened in 1897.

III

It was devastating. People got scared; people failed; people could not borrow money; the banks ran around in circles; the newspapers bought bigger type to advertise the PANIC and so make it certain. Nobody was immune from anxiety, except our foreign tourists.

Fred had a dreadful time to keep afloat. He was on the edge

of bankruptcy a dozen times, though his business was sound and conservative and his products as marketable as ever. But scare was in the air. He haunted banks; he made trips to the city; he hypothecated; he paid his right hand at the expense of his left; he cut expenses and contracted credit; somehow he kept afloat, but he was wrinkled and careworn and sleepless. Minnie missed him in the night and, slipping down to his den, found him pacing the floor, clad only in his thin pajamas.

"You'll catch your death!" she cried, and ran for his dressing gown.

She tried to find out the details of what troubled him; but true to his old-fashioned idea that a man's women should not be bothered with business affairs, he was vague. She gathered that he was at his wits' end to raise a sum of money with which to meet imperative obligations.

"I've been everywhere," he said, "there is no longer such a thing as credit. People are protecting themselves. It's a crime!" he cried bitterly. "I am perfectly sound. I can pay if they would only give me time!"

"How much time have you?" asked Minnie.

"If I could show a certainty of payment I could get an extension of a month or so, I suppose," said Fred. He lighted a cigar and dropped into a chair. "But that's the trouble: I can't."

"I had no idea," said Minnie, "no idea at all. You should have let me know! Why, there's no sense at all in our living the way we do. What do you suppose I really care about such things! We're spending an awful lot of money——"

But Fred cut her short.

"That isn't a flea-bite, dear. If we weather this, it don't matter. And if we don't, a few dollars one way or the other won't matter either."

Minnie crossed the room to sit on the arm of Fred's chair.

"I wish I could help," she said, "I wish I knew how. But I want you to know this: you mustn't worry on my account. I like the things we've had, of course; but they really don't mean much to me. I've done my own work before, and I can do it again and be perfectly happy. I want you to understand that, Fred."

"You're a brick, Minnie," he sighed, and clasped her waist.

But she disengaged herself and stood up.

"Uncle Zeke will be back next month," she suggested, "or perhaps you can cable him. Have you thought of that?"

Fred laughed bitterly.

"I have thought of everything. I cabled Uncle Zeke ten days ago."

"Yes?"

"He did not cable a reply. To-day I received a letter from him."

"Well, tell me! For heaven's sake go on!"

"I don't understand him," confessed Fred, "I can't make him out. He was not unkind about it, and he apparently had some sort of idea—but I don't see it. I merely asked him for a loan, and in my opinion the assurance of repayment is good."

"But he refused?"

"The letter is in my overcoat. Wait a moment—I'll get it."

He returned after a moment to hand her a sheet of the flimsy paper then used for foreign correspondence. She switched on a desk light to read it.

Dear Fred:

I was much interested in your cable, and have given it careful consideration. "Adversity," says a certain wise man, "is the wine that tempers the blade." As an avowed spectator of life it is my habit not to intermeddle with the mysteries of its processes. To intermeddle is, in my experience, to bungle. You have my heartfelt wishes for your success in the crisis that confronts you. I shall await the outcome with the deepest interest; and whatever that outcome may be I expect with confidence that the tempering will hold.

I need hardly add that in any case the danger of starvation is nil.

"I think he is crazy," said Fred gloomily, when she had finished.

"I think——" Minnie flared; then caught herself. "At least," she said presently, "the last sentence sounds promising. After all, we *are* his heirs."

"What good will that do?" groaned Fred. "Don't you see? I've built up a business reputation for years, and here it is swept away in a few minutes. It isn't so much the money loss I mind—though that's bad enough; it's the humiliation."

"I know," said Minnie, with a flash of sympathetic understanding, "and it's a shame. But I don't see yet why the banks will not help."

"They are too busy saving their own skins; and I have no security."

"Yes, I know. But for all that—with a prospect of twelve million——"

Fred raised his head.

"That is a peculiar point. I mentioned that, of course—urged it. It had no effect. Finally Pine, who is a pretty good scout, told me privately that a rumour was about that Uncle Zeke had little intention of making us his heirs; that he was considering some foundation or benefaction or other."

"Rumour!" cried Minnie scornfully, but a chill struck across her heart.

"Rumour is what business is being run on just now," said Fred. "I don't know who starts them all."

A recollection of Marcel's smooth smug countenance crossed Minnie's mind, and behind it more dimly the watchful cynical smiling face of old Mr. Kirby.

"I'd like to kill that old man!" she cried in a sudden fury.

"Why, *Minnie!*" exclaimed Fred.

"Oh, I know; he's family, and sacred," she thrust bitterly, "but he's a selfish, domineering, sneering old *pig*, and I'd like to kill him."

"You're overwrought, dear," said Fred anxiously, rising, "I shouldn't have bothered you with my troubles. Why, you're trembling like a leaf. You'll catch your death of cold; you must get back to bed."

IV

While all the mighty argosies of trade were thus tossed by the billows, it was evident that amateur-built cockleshells like Freeman's were in a hard way. Any seaman will tell you that in-shore wind with the rising tide makes for smooth waters; but that against the ebb it raises a bad sea. In this year of 1897 the tide fell very fast.

A peculiarity of the lesser financiers, such as Freeman and Canby, is that they never seem to realize that the tide has actually turned. They look on the signs of recession as chance eddies or backwashes, and they can prove to each other by their own astronomy that the waters must continue to rise.

"Sorry to ask you for more margin, old man," quoth Canby, "but these confounded banks are getting awfully tightwad lately. It's a nuisance, I know; but it will be only for a week or so. You see the crops are beginning to move, and that takes all the spare credits; and then on top of that comes this measly little Balkan fuss. Gosh! I've been in the game a long time,

but I never get over being surprised at what a chicken-hearted lot Wall Street is. Say *boo!* at them and they run."

"All right," said Freeman, "how much?"

"Oh, a couple of points will be *ample!* I don't suppose we'll need that, but it's better to be on the safe side. I'd hate to see you sold out before you had time to cover."

"My Lord, Can, you wouldn't do that to *me!*" cried Freeman.

"I couldn't help myself, my son. Strict orders. It isn't in my hands at all. The big brokers are taking no chances a-tall."

"Well, for heaven's sake! I don't want to be sold out at *this* stage of the game."

"I should think not," agreed Canby jovially. "Why, this is the biggest killing of your young life."

And indeed it had every prospect of so being. All the dope pointed to that.

But unfortunately the market continued to fall. The two points, that had looked so safe and useless, suddenly became only a thin wall against which already the waters were beating. Canby advised a greater margin of safety. Freeman with difficulty complied. The process is familiar. Repeat it until you find Freeman, shaken from his complacent ease, filled with a mixture of dismay, disappointment, and blind anger against this idiotic market that—apparently just to spite Freeman—continued to go down when both Freeman and Canby had *proved* that it must go up. And there came the day when Freeman, who never willingly faced disagreeable facts at all, was forced to acknowledge to himself that he had made a mistake!

"I can't do it," he told Canby that evening when he made his usual visit after banking hours, "I can't raise any more margin. Let it slide." Freeman grasped feebly for an already dim recollection of how a good sportsman should lose, but with indifferent success.

"But you *must!*" cried Canby. "Why, it would be a crime to let it go now after you've hung on so long, just as things are going right. I've got the straight dope this time; straight from headquarters. The whole thing is being manipulated. This dope comes direct from Morgan himself. It's all cut and dried."

Canby explained in the wealth of detail possessed always by those who are in the know—or who think they are.

"How much lower are they going to force it?" asked Freeman.

"Twenty-six is the figure," whispered the latter. "The mo-

ment you see twenty-six on the tape, then watch the rocket go up."

But the glow had faded from Freeman's eyes. Twenty-six meant that he must cover to the extent of ten thousand dollars—an impossible sum. He shook his head.

"Did you get any idea of when the turn would come?" he asked after a few moments of thought.

"I got an idea, though of course no one could tell exactly. But I can tell you positively this: that it won't be later than the twentieth of the month. And I'll show you why":

Canby produced a pencil and filled two pages of a tablet with figures.

"It's a cinch if there ever was one, and you've simply got to be in on it," said he. "Raise it, beg it, borrow it, steal it—why, it's a fortune, man! I should think you could get it from old Kirby too easy: he's rolling in it."

"I could," prevaricated Freeman easily, "only the devil of it is he's been abroad and is just on his way home. I can't get at him. But I'll see what I can do."

He went to Fred's office, which indicates how serious the matter was to him. He would rather have faced a cannon than Fred on any such affair, only there were no cannon loaded with specie anywhere about. But it was a plain case. If Freeman were closed out now, he would not only lose the little fortune within his grasp, he would not only lose his prestige with Canby's set as the miniature Napoleon, but he would also be deprived of his Japanese servant, his little comfortable brick house, and whatever of personal effects a mysterious bankruptcy law did not exempt. For it must be understood that Freeman had already exhausted in greater or less borrowings what slender credit he possessed.

Fred proved much less formidable, much less hortatory or humiliating; but also even less satisfactory than he had expected.

"I do not approve of gambling on margins," was all he said on that point. "It never works out in the long run. But you've found that out. The only thing I can advise you, Freeman, is to take your medicine and chalk it up to experience."

Fred actually seemed to think that Freeman had come to him merely for advice!

"But if I am sold out it will take every cent I've got," Freeman cried resentfully.

"Sorry," returned Fred, "but after all, Freeman, you are a

young man, and you have no one dependent on you. It won't be fatal. It's part of the game."

Freeman flung himself out of the office seething with anger. The old smothered antagonism that had always and irritably existed between two such opposite types flamed out. For once Freeman was thoroughly aroused from his inertia, fighting mad, filled with the spirit to do and dare, and backed by a dangerous feeling of injustice. With the light of battle in his eyes, he headed down the street.

V

At five minutes past twelve the following day he entered Canby's office, having telephoned from the bank that the broker was to await him.

"There you are," he burst out as soon as the office door had swung shut.

"Good Lord!" cried Canby, astonished. "Why the devil did you bring *cash*!"

For a moment Freeman looked confused, but instantly recovered.

"It's good, isn't it?" he challenged. "I don't want that old fool Pine to spot any check of mine for that amount to you, do I?"

"Sure not; suit yourself," replied Canby. "I knew you'd get it if anybody could."

"Give me my receipt," commanded Freeman. "And for God's sake I hope you're right in what you say. This cleans me out."

"You needn't worry," replied Canby easily, as he pressed the bell-button for one of the stenographers.

CHAPTER XXIII

I

MINNIE went on to New York to meet the returning travellers. She found Mr. Kirby unchanged by a hair, either in appearance or in manner. Zozo had grown. He carried himself better. But the old backward, reluctant mannerism when questioned or directly addressed had deepened. During the drive he talked a good deal, but always in spontaneous greeting of familiar things American. Minnie's questions elicited nothing coherent as to either his experiences or his pleasure abroad. She smiled at Mr. Kirby, searching for sympathetic understanding.

"He's so glad to get home, he can't talk of anything else—yet," she said.

"I am sure it must be considered quite natural," he replied, with his mask-like grimace of amiability.

Minnie felt a vague bafflement.

"I hope he was a good boy and not *too* much trouble," she ventured again.

"Of that you can be well assured."

She sank back against the cushion, a faint line between her eyes. There was nothing to go on, of course; but she sensed a reservation, an almost ironic tension. She hoped nothing had gone wrong—Oh, well, it could be smoothed over. No reasonable human being could take too seriously misbehaviour in a child of ten! She was a mother of a peculiarly vivid and eager temperament. It would never occur to her that anything but some childish misbehaviour could be in question.

II

The big mansion below the Hill had, of course, been fully prepared for the return. Mr. Kirby drove up to his front door and at once stepped into his environment as casually as though he had only been out for an hour's excursion. Jean silently opened the

door as he mounted the front steps, discreetly acknowledged a greeting, took his coat and hat. Mr. Kirby, followed by Marcel, mounted the broad soft stairs and proceeded to his own little second-story sitting room. A fire burned brightly in the grate before which stood the deep armchair. Alongside was the tabouret with the long thin light cigars. The old gentleman sank down with a sigh of content.

"Do you know, Marcel," he remarked, "I am glad to get back. I confess I would rather be here this minute than in Paris. Two years ago I should have said that would be impossible. A sign of age, I suppose."

"Paris without responsibilities might seem different to Monsieur," suggested Marcel.

"Without the boy, you mean. Perhaps that is so. But still—I do not know—anyhow, I am very content to be here. You may have brought a glass of port—bring two glasses."

He waited until Jean had set the tray on the tabouret and retired.

"Sit down, Marcel. A little over a year ago we had a certain conversation. From that day to this I have caused the subject to be dropped completely. In this I have had the purpose of allowing your judgment an opportunity uninfluenced by opinion of my own."

"You refer to the question of the boy, monsieur."

"My grand-nephew, of course. I will confess to you, Marcel, that I am puzzled. My judgments, I may flatter myself, are usually at least clear-cut, however faulty they may be: but in this case I am loath to follow where mere observation would seem to lead me."

He sipped his wine reflectively.

"The boy seems sullen, dumb, insensible to things offered him. As far as one can judge from externals he has not a spark in him, a dead weight. There is no response to the things to which I would have him keenly alive. I would gladly give anything I possess to be able to say otherwise; but the facts have been under my eyes for a year."

He paused, but Marcel, who was watching him steadily, saw he expected no comment, so remained silent.

"And yet—and yet—I would not do an injustice. He is of course a mere child. Perhaps these attitudes are outgrown—perhaps some natures are late in developing. I do not know. I

have had no experience with children. Except with one: myself. I can remember myself at his age very distinctly, Marcel; more and more distinctly, it seems to me, the older I grow. And remembering myself, I am the more discouraged by this one. Open the wall safe and bring me the will I made a year ago."

Marcel obeyed. Mr. Kirby glanced over the paragraphs and sighed.

"I wish I knew. It is to me a very responsible thing to place the power this represents into unworthy or incompetent hands. If I followed my weary and discouraged inclination after this dreadful year of effort and disappointment, I would throw this on the coals there and at once set about another devisement. But I do not know—I do not know.

"You also have made your observations for a year. What is your opinion?"

Marcel hesitated. A speculative gleam appeared in the depths of his eyes.

"This seems to me also a serious matter to decide," he observed.

Mr. Kirby smiled his fine and cynical smile.

"I hope you do not flatter yourself that your decision is necessarily final," he remarked drily.

"I do not flatter myself so, monsieur; nevertheless, as for me, what I tell as my judgment is as serious as though it were final."

"You are right, Marcel. I beg your pardon."

"I could give you an opinion, monsieur. I have made my judgments; I would be a fool otherwise. Yet before I express them, I would much like to pass them in review. If it suits Monsieur, can I be permitted to write him a report? It is my *habitude*, writing reports for Monsieur, as Monsieur well knows. In this manner I can give my best judgment, my best reason."

"You are right. So be it." He indicated the will lying on the tabouret. "You may replace this in the safe. I shall not need you for a while."

Marcel stowed the paper in one of the pigeonholes of the wall safe, shut the door, and whirled the tumblers. As he left the room a fine enigmatic smile sketched itself on his lips. Marcel had an idea.

CHAPTER XXIV

I

MINNIE returned to her home filled with a vague uneasiness. She sensed that matters had not gone well. In spite of—or perhaps through—Zozo's unwonted animation at reëncountering the old and familiar things, she realized that the foreign travel had been endured rather than appreciated. It did not seem possible that because of slight disappointment in the exact development of a child of ten any sane man would go to the extreme of diverting a huge fortune from its natural successors. That would be too absurd! And yet she could not pretend even to have penetrated below the smooth and polished surface Mr. Kirby showed to the world.

But even though a possible dissatisfaction with the results of this foreign experiment did not go to the extreme measure of disinherittance, nevertheless, it was unfortunate at just this time. Minnie realized perfectly that her favour in the old gentleman's eyes was absolutely dependent on his satisfaction with the only tie that connected them—Zozo. When things went well there, he so far approved of her as to make her feel that her influence on him might be permitted to be considerable. When the results of their conspiracies toward education were disappointing, she was thrust into a sort of fierce contempt.

And aside from ultimate aims, Minnie had a very definite and very pressing need to stand well for the moment. She had a favour to ask. Fred, by incredible exertions, was still afloat. But he must have money; and Minnie had promised herself that she would make an attempt to get it.

II

The train had arrived in the middle of the morning. Minnie did not expect that Freeman would be able to get off to meet it, nor indeed that it would occur to him to try to do so; but she had

anticipated that her brother might mount the Hill at the lunch hour to see his own nephew after a year's absence. When that hour passed without his appearance she felt a slight resentment. The adorable Zozo was surely worth the effort.

But at five o'clock he came.

Minnie met him in the hallway, with some words of half-playful reproach; which, however, died on her lips when she looked into his face. His exterior was calm, correct, and superior; but Minnie, whose family affections were her strong point of perception, saw at once that he was seriously disturbed. Nothing was said of importance until Zozo had been greeted, his appearance praised, his reticence assaulted in vain, and himself dismissed.

"What is it, Freeman dear?" then cried Minnie.

"What is what?"

"Don't spar with me: something is the matter."

He hesitated, a slow flush mounting to his sallow cheek.

"I don't know how to tell you exactly," he fumbled. "It is so easy not to understand—to give a wrong impression——"

"I knew there was trouble! You must tell me: perhaps I can help. You know you can depend on me to understand, Freeman darling."

He lighted a cigarette, trying for ease. As a matter of fact, he had come for the express purpose of telling her about it, with a very exact calculation of the help she was to give him. Nevertheless, it was hard to get started. Like most weak people, Freeman had slowly built up an idea of himself, mainly fictitious; and his pride rebelled fiercely when exigency forced reality on his attention.

"Tell me right from the beginning," Minnie urged him. "I'll understand. I know it's nothing really to be ashamed of."

"No, it isn't! It's really the most trifling sort of bad luck. It's one of those things that happen that look bad to people who do not know all the circumstances. Of course, you can't go around explaining just how it was to every Tom, Dick, and Harry, and the result is your reputation suffers. It's most annoying."

He backed and filled for a time; finally blurted out that he owed the bank money.

"The bad luck of the thing," Freeman pointed out, "is that the bank examiners will be here the first of the week. The Board

was here ten days ago, and there certainly was no reason on earth to expect another visitation so soon. It's never happened before, and of course it's just my confounded luck that the one time it did happen should catch me this way."

Minnie was bewildered.

"But I don't see—I'm very stupid—I'm afraid you'll have to explain in A B C, dear. I really know nothing about business. What have the bank examiners to do with it?"

It took Freeman twenty minutes; but finally he got it over. Minnie gathered that Freeman had borrowed certain sums from the bank—that is, of course, the function of a bank, to be borrowed from; that unfortunately his loan had been "unofficial"—careful explanation that it was not at all unusual for small items of business to be performed first, without authority, subject to certain ratification later; that, in fact, Freeman had made this loan to himself—he often made small loans in his official capacity, when the Cashier was not present; that unfortunately the repayment of this loan at just this moment would lose him a large sum of money, indeed so large a sum that he would be unable to repay the bank; that, on the other hand, if he did not have to repay at once, his investments would, not later than the middle of the month, return him an enormous profit.

"But why don't you just speak to Mr. Pine about it?" enquired Minnie.

Freeman was exasperated. Here he had humbled himself to make this confession, and she did not know any better than to ask such a fool question! He commanded his patience with difficulty.

"I had no security, you see."

"But I don't see why you don't just fix it with Mr. Pine," persisted the incredible woman, "—or get Fred to."

"Good God, Minnie," he burst out, "are you as ignorant as all that, or just a plain fool!"

She drew herself up, staring wide-eyed at a Freeman she had never known.

"I do not think you have ever spoken to me like that in your life," she said with dignity, "and I certainly see no occasion for your doing so now."

He controlled himself with an effort.

"I beg pardon. But don't you see——"

"I see nothing. I told you I know nothing about these things,

and I cannot see the cause of your excitement, unless what you have done at the bank is irregular and unusual."

He seized on this with relief.

"That's it exactly. It *is* irregular: I told you that as plainly as I could. But it is not unusual. It is done every day by bankers everywhere. You see according to the strict interpretation of the law a bank is not supposed to lend money to any of its own officers. That's the law, but it's obsolete, a dead letter, nobody pays the slightest attention to it. It's one of those things that *has* to be ignored or the business of the country would come to a standstill."

"Then I don't see——"

"That's the rank rotten injustice of it! The big fellows do it every day of the week, these confounded examiners wink at it or don't see it. But I'm a little fellow. And if they can catch someone like me, they are delighted."

Minnie thought rapidly.

"Well," she said, "I see. But I think you are unduly alarmed. You know we are not such little fellows after all. I'll speak to Fred and he will fix it with Mr. Pine."

"Good *heavens*, Minnie, can't I *make* you understand? It *is* an irregular proceeding: I admit that. And Fred or any one else couldn't fix it with old Pine. It isn't 'fixing' that is needed here; it's *money* to put back until I get my own payments."

"How much would you need?"

Freeman poked his stick at a spot in the rug.

"Nine thousand dollars," he muttered.

"Good heavens! Good *heavens*!" cried Minnie, aghast.

"I know it sounds big," said Freeman, still poking at the spot, "but it really isn't, if you know all the details. I'll have it all back many times over by the middle of the month. It was the chance of a lifetime and I'd have been a fool not to have taken it."

"But why didn't you——"

"Well, I didn't," Freeman pointed out shortly. "And I've got to get that money, I tell you. If I don't, I'll lose all I've invested, and the bank will lose all I've borrowed, and I'll go to jail."

"Jail!" echoed Minnie, faintly.

"Yes, jail," he repeated, driving the word home with a sort of perverted relish. "Can't you understand the seriousness of the situation?"

She was sitting upright and looking at him intently.

"Then this is a crime, this thing you have done."

"I tell you it's done every day. It's a technicality. If every official who had borrowed money from his own bank were in jail there wouldn't be a bank open in the whole country."

"Oh, Freeman, why *did* you take such chances!"

He turned sullen.

"You can't expect any one to live on their miserable salaries. I might have known you'd take that attitude. All women do. I'm sorry I told you."

She clasped her hands tightly.

"I'll help you, Freeman. You know I will. I do not mean to be unkind when you are in trouble. But I am overwhelmed. You think you are explaining nicely, dear; but you are a little vague. My head is in a whirl. What do you want me to do?"

"I've got to have that money; and you can get it. It's only a temporary thing. I will pay it back by the fifteenth."

She thought.

"Fred couldn't possibly raise that amount. Zozo has ten thousand but it is in trust. Can't you borrow it of Uncle Zeke?"

Freeman's soft features hardened into a bitter sneer.

"He wouldn't let me have it. He would be tickled to death to see me in a hole and be able to say 'I told you so.' He hates me."

"Oh, no, Freeman!" faltered Minnie, but without conviction.

"Oh, yes, Freeman!" he mimicked her. "Don't you suppose I know? Haven't I seen his supercilious sneer every time he looked at me? Doesn't he always try to put me in the wrong before people, make me feel uncomfortable? Don't tell me!" For the first time he looked up from the rug. "But look here, Minnie; you're different. He's stuck on you. You're as thick as thieves. You can get it from him easily, and no questions asked."

"Oh, I wouldn't like that!" exclaimed Minnie, recoiling.

He misunderstood her. Of course he knew nothing of Fred's situation, nor of Minnie's plans thereanent. His strained nerves were beginning to give way. He rose to his feet, dashing the point of his stick against the floor.

"No, you'd rather see me disgraced—in jail—ruined—through no fault of my own!" he cried savagely.

She, too, rose, and walked across to put her two hands on his shoulders.

"If I do what I can, will you promise never to take such chances again?"

At once he became affectionate, winning, the old Freeman.

"You know I will, Sis. That's a promise with a big P. I knew you'd stand by me."

"I don't know what I can say to him," she lamented. This added complication made the situation overwhelming.

"Oh, tell him anything you please," advised Freeman airily, "only don't drag my name into it. That would ruin the whole show with that old skate!"

"Well, I'll do what I can," she promised. "I was going to see him first thing in the morning."

"Can't you make it this evening?"

"No; I couldn't go without Fred in the evening. I'd better see him alone."

When Freeman left she moved to the living-room window to watch him. He swung down the driveway jauntily, clipping at the bushes with his stick as though he had not a care in the world. As a matter of fact, he had not. Minnie was a good old scout: she'd fix it!

III

Minnie's maternal instincts extended beyond her own progeny to produce an unreasoning family loyalty. We all know such women; indeed the trait might fairly be called feminine in greater or lesser degree. It results in blurring of the reasoning powers and of the sense of justice. If Minnie had stopped two seconds to think, the situation could not have remained obscure to her. She did not stop to think. When that particular button was pressed her immediate reaction was of indignant defence. Of course, Freeman had probably done wrong, but he would not do it again, and it was a shame that he should be so persecuted!

With the morning, and the renewed energy from a good night's rest, things did not look so black. Indeed, the necessity of a *démarche* for Freeman as well as for Fred stiffened her determination. By adroit and sympathetic questioning she had learned the amount Fred would need to carry over. It should not be difficult—provided she succeeded at all—to add on the nine thousand additional. The only problem would be to segregate that amount from the whole: it would not do to turn it over to Fred.

She dressed with care, for she realized perfectly the effect of modish and well-groomed appearance on the old gentleman; and—to those whose eyes had become accustomed to the current vagaries of feminine style—she would have presented a very engaging figure as she stepped into her coupé. In the curtained reception room she waited with what fortitude she could summon. Finally Marcel himself appeared with apologies and a request that she would give herself the trouble to mount to Monsieur's private sitting room.

He greeted her at the door and conducted her to one of two chairs drawn comfortably before a blazing fire.

"These mornings are chilly for an old man, my dear," he told her, deepening the fine lines about his eyes with amiability. "Of course, the house is warm, but it is the cheer of the open fire——" He seated her personally, poked the fire, and finally himself sat down, giving her his whole attention in his ironically solicitous manner.

"I have come," began Minnie in a light tone, "to ask a favour, a tremendous favour."

"My dear, of course, as you know, I am all yours to command. Is it something to do with the boy?"

Minnie shook her head. She was embarrassed, but she tried to conceal the fact under what might be called a confidential archness.

"It is a most singular favour. And the worst of it is, I cannot explain why I want it. It is money: a loan for a short time."

She paused for a reply or comment. None came. Mr. Kirby sat as though inanimate except for the unwavering gaze of his snapping black eyes.

"You have been out of the country for a year," went on Minnie, "and perhaps you do not realize the crisis through which the country is passing. It is a panic, I believe."

"I have fully informed myself," he told her suavely.

"In that case you understand that it is a catastrophe that affects all business men alike, and that to have been caught in difficulties—temporary difficulties—is no reflection on business ability."

"Of that, also, I am fully aware."

"In that case," continued Minnie, taking a little heart, "I want you to consider Fred. He started with nothing, literally nothing; and he has in fifteen years by his own unaided efforts

made for himself not only a large and growing business, but a not inconsiderable place in the community. Whatever may be your attitude toward the business world, you cannot but admit that——”

“I admit it, my dear. I admire it,” he interrupted her gracefully. “I assure you I have the greatest respect for Fred and his accomplishments.”

“If that is truly so, sir,” she pleaded, “then surely you cannot sit one side and watch the wreck of so much worthy effort without raising a hand to help.”

“Fred and I have already enjoyed some interesting correspondence on that subject. I expressed to him my views; with brevity, to be sure, but I had thought with clarity.”

Minnie looked at his attentive polite mask-like face with something like despair. The old bitter hot irritation was rising in her breast. She struggled to keep it down.

“I saw your letter,” she said, “and I think I see your point of view. But I hope to make you see that this isn’t a question of starvation, as you called it. It is a question of Fred’s self-respect. I think the humiliation of failure would break his heart.”

“I trust not. Perhaps, madame, I have a better opinion of your husband’s fibre than yourself.”

She choked at the cool hard arrogance of his words couched in the softness of his courtesy.

“It is cruel to test his fibre so ruthlessly!” she cried.

“All life is a test,” he pointed out blandly. “He is a rash and insolent being who presumes to interfere with the mysteries of life.” He paused. “May I ask if Fred is aware of the purpose of this visit?” he asked.

“Certainly not!” she cried, furious. “I think he would die rather than approach you again!”

“Ah,” sighed old Mr. Kirby, leaning back and placing the tips of his white slender fingers together, “that at least is satisfactory.”

Minnie sat upright in her chair. She was close to tears, but they were tears of sheer rage. But she could not allow herself to give up yet.

“Surely, surely,” she cried, “you will not refuse to extend a hand to a man struggling as he is struggling now. If you could have seen him as I saw him the other night, pacing the floor, seeking a way out like some trapped animal, you could not remain so aloof!”

"Ah!" enunciated Mr. Kirby. "He then despairs?"

"He fights!" countered Minnie, "and what do you do?"

"I?" Mr. Kirby raised his eyebrows gently, "I? I watch."

IV

A log fell in the fireplace. Mr. Kirby replaced it with the tongs. He did not resume his seat.

"Madame," said he, with an edge in the suavity of his tones, "I am willing to concede the disinterestedness of your motives in honouring me with a call this morning. I am not insensible of the fact that you display courage and have overcome a certain natural distaste for your errand. But conceding that, you must pardon me if I remark further that I find you attempt to influence my course of conduct in a manner to which I am unaccustomed. My judgment is perhaps fallible, but it has the merit, from my point of view, of possessing my full confidence. What my course of action is to be in this—and other—matters I do not at present feel inclined to disclose."

He looked down at her from his greater height.

She made no comment, but sat rigid, struggling for control of herself.

"Indeed," he continued after a moment, "my reticence may perhaps be forgiven when you reflect that it is modelled upon your own. There is the matter of ten thousand dollars—or shall we be accurate and say nine?"

She looked up, startled from her self-possession, and the colour left her face.

"Explanations are perhaps unnecessary," continued Mr. Kirby, raising his hand. "My knowledge of the situation is already quite perfect. I will relieve you of the embarrassment of detailing it. Your brother, Mr. Freeman Farnum, has been for some time exceeding his income. He has been gambling. In order to save himself he has embezzled. Exposure is now imminent. You want me to advance the money to save him."

Minnie's heart sank. She tried in vain to meet the cold amusement of his narrowed gaze. He was inexpressibly formidable with his armour of old-world courtesy, his uncanny knowledge of detail so promptly acquired after a year's absence. Then the hot wave of indignation again swept over her.

"You have no right to say that!" she cried.

"Am I not correct?"

"What you say is partly true. But your statement is cruelly harsh."

"I find it descriptive merely," he returned.

Minnie rushed into defence, her words tumbling over each other, elaborating from the point of view Freeman had supplied, emphasizing the customary borrowing from the bank and all the rest of his sophistries. Her anger was for the moment submerged in her eagerness. Mr. Kirby listened with his customary polite poised attention.

"Rubbish!" he commented briskly when she had finished. "I know what I am talking about. I have means of knowing. I call things by their right names. All embezzlers talk of 'borrowing.'"

"But," persisted Minnie, "bank officials do borrow from their own banks. It's done every day. Of course, it's irregular, but——"

He examined her closely, appraising her sincerity and understanding.

"They borrow through the usual and proper channels," he decided to explain, "and in the regular course of business, with ratification by their directors. They do not secretly dip their hands in the till. One is an irregularity; the other is a crime."

Minnie fired up at the last word.

"I know nothing of business; but one thing I do know, that my brother is not a criminal!" she cried.

"The world will call him so," Mr. Kirby pointed out.

"All the stronger reason for my wanting the money," urged Minnie. "I cannot argue the fine points of business, because I do not know them. I only know my brother is in trouble and I have come to you for help. He is not asking; I am. Will you help me?"

"No," pronounced Mr. Kirby directly.

Minnie stared at him breathless. She had spent herself and was for the moment poised in uncertainty.

"I do not know where to turn if I cannot get help here," she faltered.

Mr. Kirby lent her his air of polite solicitude.

"That I cannot help," he returned, with apparent regret.

"But don't you see—public disgrace——"

"I have," stated Mr. Kirby, "no intention of compounding a felony. That is what it would amount to, you know."

"It is only a temporary loan: I am not asking for a gift," Minnie reminded him. "It will be all repaid by the middle of the month."

Mr. Kirby permitted himself a thin smile.

"Rubbish," said he. "Your brother is a fool. He is speculating: he will lose."

"But the disgrace!" cried Minnie, her control slipping. "To save the name!"

"May I point out to you," observed the old gentleman, "that it is not my name?"

Anger at last swept her away. All the repressions, unrecognized at the time, imposed upon her free independence by the example, the standards, the superiorities, the deferences due this singularly rigid old man rose irresistibly to add force to her emotion. She found suddenly in herself a hatred that she had never recognized; a hatred for the cold precision of the man opposite her, for his assurance that his own standards were uniquely correct, for the meticulous nicety of his manners, the velvet-softened iron of his authority. And she discovered further in herself a terrifying force, reckless of consequences that suddenly bubbled very close to the surface.

"I find your attitude insulting," she said.

He arose, and she arose with him.

"That I regret. But I cannot alter my judgment." He extended his hand toward the bell. "I will have Marcel show you out."

"Thank you," she cried, furious, "you may spare him that trouble. I refuse to be turned out when I am no longer agreeable. Yes!" she insisted at his polite deprecating gesture, "that is what it amounts to. I am no fool. Yes, I am a fool—to have come here on such an errand. It means more to me and mine than life itself, and you refuse it as you would refuse to buy a pencil of a beggar! I have felt you for a long time as what you are, but I have blinded myself and repressed myself and wilfully deceived myself. This has opened my eyes. You are a cruel, selfish, cynical old man!"

"May I be permitted to remind you," he cut in suavely, "that you have a son as well as a brother; and that your quite laudable family zeal might consider the one rather than the other?"

"You mean consider your money," she countered bluntly. "Why can't you even say what you mean? I am sick of con-

sidering your money. I've considered it altogether too much. I don't want your money at the price you demand of me. I am not going to stand here while you call my own brother a criminal and threaten me with your displeasure. You rich people are all alike. You think your money will buy you our very souls!"

Minnie was beyond herself. She was expressing as long-held convictions things that until two minutes ago had been so deeply buried she had been totally unaware of their existence. And perhaps two minutes hence they would again fall so far below the threshold that she would deny their reality. Yes, Minnie was likely to regret exceedingly when, as she would have expressed it, she'd got hold of herself.

Mr. Kirby's eyes narrowed, but his manner remained flawless.

"I find your sentiments somewhat vulgar," he stated.

"I find you and your affectations ridiculous!" shot back Minnie.

Each had, in a word apiece, done the utmost. Mr. Kirby again reached to the bell with a hand that trembled slightly. Jean almost instantly opened the door.

"Marcel is in the town," said he. "Monsieur desires?"

"Madame is just going," said Mr. Kirby, in his usual tone. "Will you conduct her to her carriage?"

Jean bowed, but his quick scrutiny glanced from Minnie's flushed cheeks to Mr. Kirby's gleaming eyes.

V

Minnie dismissed the carriage and went home afoot. She was thoroughly shaken and aroused. A bright red spot burned in either cheek. She walked firmly, with quick decided movements. Her mind was seething and glowing but within set limits. Minnie was no woman for hysteria.

Arrived at her own house she was immediately informed that Mr. Kirby's man was waiting to see her. What new intrusion was this? Curtly she ordered him shown in.

Marcel entered the library and stood respectfully by the door. Minnie examined him with coldly appraising eyes. His correctly conventional attire, his smooth smug countenance, his falsely submissive eyes, his carefully subdued self-confidence, displeased her. Like master, like man——

"What do you want?" she demanded shortly.

Marcel glanced at her, a little surprised at her tone.

"I have come, madame, on an errand of delicacy," he said. "If I were not certain that I addressed a true woman of the world, a *cosmopolite*, I should not have come at all. To the provincial one does not speak frankly, even when there are interests in common."

"Interests in common?" repeated Minnie. What was the man driving at?

"Precisely, madame. I will speak plainly. There is nothing to be gained by doing otherwise. Our interests are in common in that they lie with the fortune of Monsieur Kirby, which, alas, in the course of events he must dispose."

"Well, really!" cried Minnie, half-rising indignantly.

Marcel raised a soothing hand.

"Wait, madame. Quite justly you think this mere presumption. But wait. Patience I beg of you. Hear me first, and then, if you please, have me shown the door."

Minnie sank back staring at him with angry eyes. What new *démarche* was this? What fresh interference did this emissary purpose?

"Go on," she conceded, in a smooth voice.

The trip abroad, Marcel hinted, had not been fortunate as far as externals were concerned. The situation perhaps made this inevitable: an old man could never understand a young boy. He, Marcel, was a philosopher who had looked upon the world and understood many things. Zozo also was possibly of a type unique: like many men of genius; in youth he is difficult, individual, not to be readily understood——

Minnie broke across his rambling approach. If he had not been so thoroughly occupied with his own diplomatic cleverness, he must have checked at her hard furious eyes.

"In other words, this trip, from your master's point of view, is a failure," she cut in.

Marcel spread his hands deprecatingly.

"Madame has *esprit*," said he. "She catches a point as it flies. But she exaggerates. It is not that in the view of Monsieur Kirby the affair has been a failure; but neither is he satisfied. He has been puzzled. He is in two minds, so nicely balanced between two decisions that a touch here or there would decide him."

The man expanded with complacent assurance. He, Marcel,

was to an extraordinary degree in Monsieur Kirby's confidence. Incidents were adduced.

"I tell you these things, madame, not to boast, but to prove my point."

Less directly he approached the main issue, with a delicacy that he inwardly applauded as a masterpiece. Without saying so he conveyed the information that old Mr. Kirby had practically left the decision as to Zozo in Marcel's hands.

Minnie was staring at him incredulously.

"Well, what has that to do with me?" she demanded curtly.

Marcel was pained. He had quite sincerely classified Minnie as a woman of the world: his designation of her as such had not been mere flattery. A woman of the world, as he understood one, would never have departed from the graceful indirections of diplomacy; the half-hints, the allusive evasions that made the savour of the game. She should have understood his drift without the stupid necessity of having things explained in A B C. Still, this one was an American——

"Since the decision is, in a way, with me, madame; and since considerations for and against appear so nicely divided——"

But Minnie again broke in. Her anger was nearing the limits of control. If she had not had the interview with Mr. Kirby, she would have had this man turned out as soon as the drift of his proposals had become evident. Now, suspecting collusion for some purpose as yet obscure, her cold anger counselled her to learn all she could.

"In other words, you want me to offer you a bribe," she interrupted.

Marcel was still more pained. The woman had no *savoir faire* at all! She was crude; a barbarian! But his conceit in his judgment was unshaken. He still considered her a woman of the world, in essentials. The essentials, with Marcel, were cold cynicism, a balanced judgment of the main chance, and a lack of moral scruple in taking the best of worldly situations. The woman was incredible; but patience! Women are queer creatures! Perhaps the mother in her is exasperated over the implied criticism of her child. She needs time.

"Ah, madame," he protested, "words are edged tools. It is wise to choose those best adapted to a situation. Surely out of so many millions a commission, let us say, is not inappropriate."

Minnie arose. The spot of red on either cheek had deepened,

but she held herself externally under control. Indeed she had to do so. If she had allowed herself one word too much she would have become either a termagant or a weeping fool.

"I have heard enough," she said; and swept from the room.

Marcel looked after her. He was not dissatisfied. She was angry for the moment, with an anger partly due to disappointment, partly to the fact that her darling had been found lacking. But she was no fool *au fond*. She knew which side her bread was buttered! Things were looking up, *mon brave*, what between the legacy from Monsieur and the commission from Madame. But he must arrange another interview very soon: there was his report waiting. He departed for downtown smilingly.

Minnie went from the library directly to the telephone.

CHAPTER XXV

MARCEL, returned from his downtown errands, sauntered up the long curving driveway quite at peace with himself.

He let himself in by a side entrance, intending to ascend to his own room to refresh himself before reporting as having returned. However, he found Jean unexpectedly lying in wait for him with instructions that he was to mount without delay, the instant he appeared. He gave Jean his hat, stick, and gloves, and did so. No uneasy thought crossed his mind.

Mr. Kirby was sitting in his usual chair before the usual fire. Marcel's keen eye noted that the wall safe was open and that a blue-bound paper he recognized as the will lay on the tabouret next the old gentleman's hand. He smiled to himself. The affair was *chauffée* evidently. It might take a bit of handling to avoid precipitate action. Well, he had confidence he could handle it!

"Monsieur desires?" he called attention to his presence.

Mr. Kirby swung slowly in his chair. Marcel's complacency received a shock. For the first time in a long service he saw his master without the customary cynically aloof mask. "The sight was not reassuring. Mr. Kirby's eyes were narrowed and glittering, the pointed ends of his white moustache seemed to quiver, his heavy eyebrows were drawn to a very humanly angry frown. For a moment he surveyed Marcel in silence.

"Come here," he commanded harshly. "Yes, I sent for you. You will leave the house at once. I will issue instructions that your wages and belongings be sent after you to any place you may designate."

"Monsieur!" cried Marcel, his wits scattering in a panic of bewilderment.

"Do not presume to speak to me," snarled Mr. Kirby. Snarled is the only word to express it. "It is disagreeable to find you a traitor. It is more disagreeable to find you a fool as well. I kept you for your brains and they seem to have deserted you."

So she had told! Oh, the fool, the imbecile! Marcel did not know whether he meant these epithets for himself or for that woman! His quick brain perceived the whole catastrophe. The day was lost; and all the other endless days he had slaved and served and put up with this old man's whims, this old man, whom suddenly he hated—had hated all along. *Canaille!* A blind anger seized him.

"In what have I offended Monsieur?" he babbled mechanically. The question broke down the last restraints.

"My God!" cried Mr. Kirby in a voice no one had ever heard before. "Are you trying to make me out a fool also—more of a fool than I have been?" He checked himself, and went on with a resumption of his old manner. "Look here, Marcel; you would have been satisfied with what you would have found here"—he struck the paper at his side—"I do not blame you, however, for desiring to increase your possessions. I do blame you for trying to sell to another what you had already sold to me—your judgment. I particularly blame you as a fool for not reading better the character, the motives, and the mood—particularly the mood—of those with whom you had to deal. That is stupidity, Marcel. I do not object to being served by a knave, for I know how to protect myself against knavery; but I do object to having fools about me."

The words came, deliberately spaced, biting in their cold sarcasm.

"It is a pity, a great pity," went on the old gentleman, "I feel disappointed. And also I feel humiliated that my own discernment was not better. Ah, well, it is well to keep humble."

He picked up the will, opened it, and read a portion of it.

"A hundred thousand dollars, Marcel; a fortune. Gone like that." He made a gesture as though to throw the paper into the open fire.

Something snapped in Marcel's brain.

"You shall not!" he shrieked in a hoarse voice and took a step forward.

Old Mr. Kirby reared his head.

"Shall not?" he repeated haughtily, and arose.

The two glared at each other for the first time man to man. Here, too, the long antagonism of repressed years leaped to flame. Marcel had a clear mind. A moment's reflection would have told him that the destruction or preservation of this bit of paper

was wholly immaterial. But he did not reflect. The sudden catastrophic sweeping away of years of hopeful service had swept him with them.

And by the same black magic this turning of the worm; this emergence from the habitude of respectful subservience; this rearing of a will, where volition there had never been, swept from Mr. Kirby's mind also all realization of the practical aspects. What mattered it whether the bit of paper was or was not destroyed? With Mr. Kirby in any case the disposition would finally rest. But through his whole being, like a fiery wave, swept the reaction to opposition. This traitorous servant dared ——! He arose, his face livid, holding the will in his hand.

"Shall not?" he repeated, haughtily; then, as Marcel took another step, he threw the paper on the fire.

With a cry Marcel launched himself forward.

The thick paper did not catch immediately. The old gentleman interposed. Marcel attempted to thrust him aside. The touch of hostile hands stripped the last of the artificialities. Two elemental human beings struggled in deadly antagonism. What matter that it was for a lost cause, over a useless bit of paper? Through them clashed great forces long prepared, long held in an iron repression.

The old man was of course no match for the younger, but his feeble strength reënforced by the flare of the outrage held off his antagonist for five seconds. And those five seconds were sufficient to heat the paper to the point of ignition. It burst into a sudden upspringing flame. Mr. Kirby uttered a cry of wild and barbaric triumph—then collapsed to the floor.

Marcel stood over him panting heavily. His wits gradually returned to him, and with them a realization of the whole situation. It was complete. Slowly the great clock in the hall ticked away the minutes. It struck the quarter hour, then the half. At last Marcel sighed deeply and stirred. His eyes were dull, and he moved heavily. For the moment he was in the depths, but with the logical clarity of the French mind he had fronted the situation in all its aspects and had faced with some degree of philosophy what could not be avoided.

He lifted the old gentleman and returned him not too ungently to the armchair. After a few moments of examination he straightened his back and looked about the room. The wall safe he closed, the fire irons he restored to their rack whence

they had fallen. He stood for another moment in deep thought. Then he shrugged his shoulders and seated himself at the table desk in the middle of the room. For two minutes he methodically ran over the pages of the telephone directory, occasionally jotting down a number on the blank pad next his hand. At last he called for the first of the numbers on his list.

"Is this Mr. Frederick Kirby's office?" he queried when the connection had been made. "Is he there?—This is Marcel, Mr. Kirby—Mr. Ezekiel Kirby has just suffered a stroke—paralysis, I think—Yes, he is dead."

No sooner had Fred hung up the receiver after listening to Marcel's news than the bell again rang. It was Pine at the bank. His voice was troubled and very urgent.

"I want you to come over here at once," came the voice. "It's most important."

"I can't just now," Fred replied. "I have had word that Mr. Ezekiel Kirby has just died suddenly. I must go up there. Will you tell Freeman, please? What is your business? Can't you give it over the 'phone?"

"I am sorry to hear your news, Fred," came the reply. "What I have to say is important; it will wait. If there is anything I can do—— Good-bye."

At the bank Pine hung up the receiver and turned slowly to the bank examiner who sat at his elbow.

"I think we will postpone this matter, if you don't mind, Mr. Sanborn. The situation has altered somewhat."

"What has altered it?" demanded the official harshly.

"Twelve million dollars," said Pine.

As Sanborn left the bank he looked searchingly into Freeman's cage. Freeman bent closely over his books and his hand was trembling. It had required his whole courage to keep at his task that morning. One ear was cocked for a telephone ring—*what* was delaying Minnie! He did not dare call her. He sat on his stool, nerves aquiver. Someone spoke unexpectedly at his elbow, and he started, almost overset the ink. It was one of the messengers at his elbow, summoning him to Pine's office.

It had come, then. Mechanically he set his feet in motion toward the President's office. Outside the frosted door he paused in an effort to collect himself, then pushed it open and stood clinging to the door-knob. Luckily Pine himself began to speak: Freeman could not have commanded his voice.

"I have just been in communication with your brother-in-law," said the President, "and he has asked me to communicate to you the sad news that Mr. Ezekiel Kirby has just passed away, very suddenly."

The room rocked before Freeman's eyes. What did this news spell—destruction or salvation? He clung harder to the door-knob, babbling something incoherent. He became aware of Mr. Pine's eyes fixed on him with an enigmatically cynical expression.

"The news is, of course, shocking," he was saying drily, "but we must remember that Mr. Kirby was a very old man. Naturally you will want to be excused from duty."

Freeman muttered thanks and managed to escape. The agony of uncertainty was devouring him. The unexpectedly early advent of Sanborn had thrust him upon a red-hot griddle where he had squirmed for hours. How far had the official gone in his examination? Had Minnie been too late? Almost beside himself he hurried up the Hill. He was informed that Minnie had gone down to the Kirby mansion. Of course! He fairly ran down the Hill again. At the portals of the old place he hesitated in an unexplainable terror at entering this fastness that as yet for a few hours longer the terrible old man held in the awe of his physical presence. But his anxieties drove him forward.

Jean, decorous and befittingly solemn, admitted him to the room of curtains where presently Minnie joined him. She, too, wore a garment of proper decorum, but through it shone a hardly concealed air of excited triumph, that almost might be described as a gladness strangely out of place in a house of mourning. Even her movements were informed with a quick alert vitality with difficulty held muted; and through the hushed modulations of her voice vibrated something held in leash. Minnie shone.

"This is very sudden; and very sad, isn't it?" she greeted Freeman.

But his self-control was near an hysterical end. He brushed the preliminaries aside.

"Did you—have you——" he stammered.

"It's all right," she whispered, and her hand sought his sleeve. "Everything's all right!"

Freeman babbled something, he did not know what, and presently found himself in the open air beneath the trees, walking down the driveway. He was trembling, and he felt physically sick.

He thought of Larry's place, but the instant reaction of convention steered him to his own home. The Japanese servant, surprised at his unexpected return at this time of day, and still more at his ghastly appearance, nevertheless met him with the imperturbable mien of his race. Freeman brushed past him and sank into a leather chair.

"Whisky," he demanded.

CHAPTER XXVI

MINNIE'S confident assertion as well as the excitement temporarily suppressed in deference to circumstances was based not on any vulgar satisfaction over old Mr. Kirby's death, but on the content of the message by which that death was announced.

The second telephone number on Marcel's list was her own. He made his announcement of Mr. Kirby's death in his unemotional manner, and then went on:

"Will Madame permit me to add a little item of information that may save some trouble? To my certain knowledge Monsieur Kirby left no will. He had made one, but just before his death he destroyed it."

"Why do they tell me this?" asked Minnie, instantly suspicious.

"For the reason, madame, that I am about leaving town and do not desire to do so under a mistake. A copy of the will that was made is undoubtedly in Monsieur Post's office; and Monsieur Post knows that Monsieur Kirby had it in his possession. I convey to you the information of its destruction that you may avoid the ennui of a long and useless search."

"Why should I believe you?" demanded Minnie sharply.

Marcel chuckled softly.

"Madame will see by the copy that I was left an inheritance. Were I not certain that the will was destroyed I should remain to claim it. For the same reason I would have no interest in destroying the will. I hope Madame with her usual intelligence will point this out to others. I will say *adieu*, madame."

The receiver clicked.

Minnie reflected rapidly. It was undoubtedly true. And if there were no will, then Fred, as next of kin, inherited! Minnie's spirit went outward as with a rush of wings. The horizon of life expanded as though by magic.

CHAPTER XXVII

FREEMAN, sleeping heavily in a half-stupor induced by whisky and the exhaustion of an excitement that had been relieved, was brought to consciousness sometime in the night by the sound of persistent voices. For some time he had been half-aware of an equally persistent ringing of the door bell; but it was only when the Japanese, aroused at last from the tiny cubicle wherein he lodged, had shuffled to open the door, that he came to full knowledge of his surroundings.

"But I tell you we've got to see him," came a voice he recognized as Fred's.

Freeman slipped on a dressing gown and slippers. It was typical of him that he paused at the dressing table to smooth his shining black hair. His brain still sang with the whisky, and he had the greatest difficulty in collecting his faculties. Something was wrong—he could not remember——

He came back with a snap, and a deadly chill shivered over him when he pushed open the door and saw that Fred was not alone and that his companion was Mr. Pine.

"Come in and shut the door," Fred ordered. "I've something to say to you."

Freeman obeyed mechanically. The Japanese slipped by him, but on the way out thrust an envelope in his hand.

"Man give that for you when you sleep," said he.

"Mr. Pine tells me that you are nine thousand dollars short at the bank," said Fred bluntly. "Well, how about it?"

His heavy bull-dog face was thrust forward and the expression of good-nature usual to it had disappeared. He looked dangerous.

"I did not take it to keep or spend," expostulated Freeman weakly. "It was just borrowed. I am going to return it next week."

"Bosh!" snorted Fred. "It's plain embezzlement, and you can be sent over the road for it."

"You won't do that!" cried Freeman. He was not cutting much of a figure before these uncompromisingly grim men; but for the first time in his life he did not care what kind of a figure he cut—he was too scared. "Think of——"

"I've thought," Fred cut him short, "and it's because I've thought, and because Pine here is a good friend of mine, that you aren't behind the bars this minute. As far as you're concerned there's no reason why you shouldn't be. But your sister is to be considered. I've arranged with Pine to make good your shortage. You will get out of town the quickest you can fix it, and you won't come back, ever, in any circumstances. That's all, and that's final."

"But—but—" stammered Freeman, "where—what shall I do—I don't know where——"

"Oh, *hell!*" cried Fred contemptuously. "Be a man! I don't care where you go or what you do, but don't you come back here. Come on, Pine!"

Freeman's eyes had dropped. He became aware that some of the words on the open note in his hand were beating on his consciousness for admission. Suddenly he threw up his head.

"Oh, I'll get out, and glad to," he said. "Do you think I stay in this hick town because I like it? Or that I've worked in a little jay penny-bank from choice? You make me sick!"

Both men turned, staring, at this sudden change of tone.

Freeman had regained completely his customary languid superiority and his crushing manner.

"You've made a lot of fuss about fixing up this little temporary shortage," he continued. "Well, let me tell you, you needn't bother. I'll arrange it all to-morrow myself. And believe me, I'll be glad to see the last of you all."

Fred's face turned red. Pine laid a restraining hand on his arm, saying to Freeman:

"Do I understand you to intimate you will replace this large sum that seems to be deficient?"

"If you call it a large sum," said Freeman, delicately stifling a yawn.

Fred could no longer be held down.

"And where do you think you can raise any such sum, you impudent pup?" he roared.

Freeman extended a graceful and negligent hand in proffer of the note he had received.

Pine took it and cast his eyes on it, glancing first at the signature.

"From Canby," he observed. "Do you wish me to read it?"

"If you will be so good," said Freeman. Fred's face turned redder.

"Dear Free," the letter ran. "It's come off even sooner than we expected. She hit twenty-six to-day, and just as I told you, she began to climb. Closed at fifty-two, which is some little jump, if I do say so myself. Congratulations, old man; and my hat is off to your nerve."

"Which means?" queried the older man, looking up. His hand still clasped Fred's forearm. "Just a minute," he told the latter, "I want to get all of this."

"It means," said Freeman magnificently, "that my calculations have been quite correct. The small loan has repaid itself some twenty or thirty times over."

Fred no longer needed restraint. His lower jaw had fallen and he was staring at Freeman with a comically bewildered expression.

"I gather from your attitude that you consider yourself justified," said Pine suavely. "I am not going to argue that point with you. But I am going to tell you this." His jaw muscles tightened and his figure straightened to its full height. "You are still a cheap embezzler of funds entrusted to your care, and it is still within my power to put you in the penitentiary during the best years of your life. I'd do it in one holy minute if it were not for my friend here. So I advise you to abate your insolence and take your orders seriously. You will leave town and you will not return. If ever you do, you will find a warrant awaiting you. That is all we have to say. Come, Fred."

"And if you whine to Minnie," threatened the latter, coming to himself, "or if you ever let her or any one else guess that there has been any trouble of any kind——" He glared at Freeman.

They went out.

Freeman lighted a cigarette with trembling fingers. Many emotions jostled within him: relief from a ghastly terror, contempt, impotent anger. Pine had read him correctly. He knew no guilt nor remorse. Rather he rebelled against the petty circumstances that had conspired to put him into this disagreeable position, and resented fiercely the narrow-minded provincial fools who had not risen to his point of view. They had talked to him

as though he were a criminal! Leave town? He laughed bitterly. Did any of them think for a moment he'd *stay* in such a backwater now that he had ample means to take his place in a bigger world?

From the decanter on the side table he poured himself whisky, drew his chair to the light, and began to figure on the back of Canby's note. The result completely restored his self-esteem. His imagination forsook Little Falls for vague and delightful visions of a larger world. The day after the funeral he left for New York. This episode of his career was finished. From it Freeman had learned—nothing!

CHAPTER XXVIII

IT WOULD have been a pity to miss the funeral. That function must be considered one of Minnie's best efforts up to that time; especially when we consider that a funeral must be more or less an improvisation unless one is content to proceed along standardized lines. That was never Minnie's way. The imported choir boys and the purple flowers were her idea, not to speak of the Bishop who had, at her summons, made a long and uncomfortable journey to be there and was staying at the Kirbys. He was preaching now, in his richly modulated voice—a good-looking man; sleek, suave, with the supremely assured manner of the highly placed ecclesiastic; standing behind the coffin, impressive in his robes. The light from one of the stained-glass windows fell across him satisfactorily. The church was filled, and while he talked every eye was fixed unwaveringly upon him as though in the deepest attention. Yet in the brains behind those eyes many thoughts passed that had little to do with painted window, or ecclesiastical trappings, or even with so important a thing as a bishop.

Cousin Jim, dressed in decent black because Minnie amid all her preoccupations had found time to remind him to wear it, sat decorously in the front pew with the family. His brown lean face was cast in sober lines. He was thinking; and the subject of his thoughts was identically the same subject that was occupying, from many angles and in different aspects, every grown man and woman in that congregation. Twelve million dollars!

Wealth!

How can we say that wealth is good, wealth is an evil, wealth spoils, wealth exalts? There is no single thing we can call wealth. It is not a single thing: it is a diverse thing. Absurd to think of it as a thing at all. It is a force; like waterpower, or electricity, or steam pressure. It is a solvent which, applied to different substances, acts in different ways. It is not sacred, it is not evil. Like any force it is unmoral; and like any genuine force it is of itself desirable, a good thing to have in the world.

Those who prate of doing away with it could as logically talk of abolishing waterpower, of draining all waters to a dead level, because floods are destructive.

Wealth? How can you speak of wealth as one thing, any more than you can speak of Man as one thing? It has as many aspects as there are men to possess it. When you face it you must make up your mind that you must consider it in one or two of its aspects only. And you must remember that, although you can justly praise or condemn, it is the aspect that receives your judgment, not the thing itself. And in the final analysis that is up to the directing intelligence——

"And so this vessel of the spirit——" came a fragment of the Bishop's smooth discourse.

The vessel of the spirit. That was it. Twelve million dollars, poured from one vessel into another; the powerful solvent meeting a new substance——

New, untried vessels of unknown substance. And then Cousin Jim's imagination, carried soothingly and without effort on the stream of the speaker's words, changed the figure and saw wealth offered as an open door, and many people passing through it who had never passed that way before, with passions mixed and tangled and wrought upon by unaccustomedness. As they entered they flamed with power; except the poor spirited who spun their little webs in a corner and lived in shy negation of opportunity, negatively good but unreckonable in timidity of living. But all the others entered danger, for that flame could burn. What a wide clash of reverberations, what a swaggering spend-thrift dissipation of egotistical irresponsibility! It fattened on its sensation of its wonderful importance, on its illusion of generosity, on the many especial privileges and prerogatives of its fulness. And to it came crowding the vainglorious parasites—from vanity, flattery, mercenary affection—with their court of fungous-growth followers, merrymakers bloated with decomposing life. And yet over all that fermenting laxity there was a fair coating of tolerance, of humour, of generous over-lordship of purchased souls. Oh, danger, danger! Cousin Jim winced back appalled. The open door for the moment seemed to him the open door into a fiery furnace for the trial of men's souls, and so many combustibles tripped through it so merrily! And yet that open door led outward——

The funeral oration went on and on. All the thought of that

multitude was not on the Twelve Millions. A little sadness touched the shadows of men's minds, the sadness due a good warrior who has gone down staunchly.

The genius of insight directed Cousin Jim's consciousness to the old man whose body lay there before the chancel, the empty vessel from which the solvent had been poured. For many years he had contained it, resisted or been modified by its chemistry. He had passed through the open door, and he had dwelt on the other side; and the residence had made of him something not unworthy. But—and unconsciously Cousin Jim shook his head slightly—the Force had modified him, too. The very necessity of insulation, perhaps.

Cousin Jim saw him all at once clearly as the Bystander. Unwilling to make presumptively futile efforts at righting what he so clearly saw to be dull and stupid and wrong, he had deliberately preferred the passivity of over-sensitization. No: not preferred, was afflicted by it. In self-defense he had smothered the vitality of his heart, had corroded it with cynicism. His vision was sensitized, exquisitely sensitized, so that he was permitted to see where other men are blind; but he was sterile because he shrank from human contact. He had considered it fastidiousness: the result was something exquisite but useless; something petrified; something that had lost its fresh growing quality; beautiful, but like a dried thing in a case.

Cousin Jim had never understood before: now in a flash he saw it, while the modulated eloquence of the Bishop flowed over the surface of his mind like lulling shallow waters.

That is why he had never seemed to move! That was why he had never been able to go one step beyond the onlooker's point of view! That was the why of his half-sympathetic half-sardonic laugh at poor human nature. His heart had existed, after all, behind the outward punctilious courtesy, but it had been over-educated, over-etiquetted, cut off at the roots from its life contacts. It had not been a free agent; it had just been allowed to do certain tricks. No, he was not heartless, just too exquisitely remote from life. Was it the wealth that had done this? Cousin Jim wished he knew!

The Bishop stopped talking. The organ swelled into a great vibrating Amen. The funeral oration over the body of old Ezekiel Kirby had been uttered; but of all that multitude Cousin Jim alone had heard it.

They filed orderly from the church and orderly were bestowed in carriages by the efficient assistants. Through the streets of the town the long procession filed at a decorous pace. At Greenlawn all had been prepared; the grave a mass of flowers, the mound of earth by it a mass of bloom. The new leaves were just beginning to show at the tops of the trees nearest the sun, as though an invisible Sower had in passing scattered them lightly from above; the sun's light was still pale with the silver of early spring.

"Earth to earth, dust to dust——" intoned the clergyman.

And he bowed his head in silent prayer, and all those about bowed their heads with him. In that hushed moment the last of old Mr. Kirby's spiritual power over them slipped away. Only the material power remained.

They raised their heads and stood a moment uncertain before turning away. Camilla Stearns, emotional as always, dried her eyes. Her mind ran naturally to the appropriate drama, so as she paused she cast a glance at the coffin in its flowery bed, and murmured the words:

"Requiescat in pace."

She might better have said *noblesse oblige*. After all, his lights, though thrown in a narrow beam, had been strong and clear, and he had followed unwaveringly where they led, out into the darkness.

CHAPTER XXIX

I

BOOTH Minnie and Fred had rather an exaggerated idea of the respect—or convention—due to a “house of mourning”; and neither, on the drive home from the funeral, made the remotest allusion to the fact that this rapid succession of events had left Fred the sole heir. Nevertheless, that fact could not fail to be uppermost in both of their minds. They burned with almost a child’s eagerness to get at it, to find out about it, to handle it as a savage handles things in determination of their reality. As to how it would affect their own lives they had not thought coherently. The possibility, at least, that at not too remote a date they would have to meet the problem had in no manner caused them to make any definite plans. That would not have been decent. One must turn the face of his mind away from such a possibility, pretending it does not exist. They had over-trained Zozo: they had not taken one iota of thought for themselves.

Even at this moment their minds were occupied with comparative trivialities rather than the larger aspects. Fred wanted to delve into the papers Bob Post had already been set to listing; Minnie wanted to go over the old mansion from top to bottom. This was in both cases little more than curiosity. Each wondered secretly how soon it would be “decent” to indulge that curiosity.

The carriage drove up to the door and stopped. Camilla Stearns awaited them.

“I sent the flowers to the hospital,” said she. “I suppose there are some down at the house. But I didn’t go down there; I didn’t know whether I ought to or not. I’ll go down if you think best?”

Minnie’s eyes brightened. Camilla was indeed a jewel!

“I think we should both go down,” said she with decision.

"There are other things besides flowers in that house. And I don't *pretend* to know what they are. The servants could steal half of them and I none the wiser. We should at least know what is there—at once. Don't you think so, Fred?"

"I think so," he agreed, but he was influenced in his agreement less by old Mr. Kirby's treasures than by a chance to get rid of Camilla. He wanted to go smoke in peace and quiet. "It's pretty late, isn't it?" he added conscientiously.

But Minnie waved this aside.

"There are plenty of servants there," said she. "I'll make them get us a little supper. You won't mind being alone to-night?" No; Fred wouldn't mind. "The more I think of it, the more important I see it is that somebody responsible should take charge *at once*. Some of those things must be fairly priceless!"

In her realization that it was entirely within her rights to issue orders for the proposed little supper, Minnie first tasted blood.

The two women reëntered the carriage and drove to the old mansion where Jean admitted them in quite his ordinary manner. They paused in the dim entrance hall, momentarily subdued. It almost seemed as though the curtains might part to disclose the formidable figure of the master. Camilla the impressionable shrank back, but Minnie immediately recovered command of herself and began the exciting, intimate exploration of the rich ~~dim~~ old house which—save for the façade of its hospitality—had so long been mysterious. The two women forcibly restrained themselves from comment in the presence of the servant, but as one item or another of convenience, of taste, of wealth, of strange custom came beneath their notice, they exchanged glances of an eloquent and bursting rapture. All these things were theirs for delightful rummaging! As the tour went on, Minnie's head reared higher and higher. She was not so much acting a part as assuming an atmosphere. It was a different Minnie who at last emerged in the darkness from the enchanted castle, a Minnie for whom the tossing of largesse in a silk-net pear-shaped purse would have seemed an entirely natural thing. And it was a different Camilla, too. This new Camilla was just a little subdued in manner, considerably exalted in spirit, and quite prepared to consider it natural to kneel for the purpose of kissing her chatelaine's lily-white though negligent hand.

II

Fred's first reactions were not so inspiring. In the interim between old Mr. Kirby's death and funeral he had been appointed by the Court as Temporary Executor. His first action in this capacity had been to hunt up Mr. Kirby's books and property lists. Fred sat down and applied himself to an attempt to understand them.

He suffered from unpreparedness.

Twelve millions were upon him; and he had made for it no channels, built for it no containers, made for it no preparation of plan or mind. Only in the vaguest manner had he even visualized it. Though he had known for some time that, barring accident, it was likely to come to him, nevertheless, its fair and square contemplation had been to his old-fashioned training somehow indelicate, like sex. One was not supposed to know that in the usual course of things people die and are born—not until it actually happened. To be caught, even in the privacy of one's closet, gauging the fit of "dead men's shoes" was a shamefaced thing. Oh, it had happened before—and since. People do the same thing as to their own deaths; or taxes; and recently we went naïvely unprepared into a war that for three years had been headed straight in our direction.

There was so much of it, so many angles of approach, that Fred did not know where to make a start. This was creative business, shaping coherency from raw material—a mass of raw material—like writing a story or painting a picture. The writer or the artist, from long experience, sustains himself by the faith that the thing *will* shape itself if pounded at long enough and steadily enough and calmly enough and in unhurried detail; but to Fred the mass of detail impended imminent as a poised avalanche. He looked at Bob Post's list of legal requisites; he lifted and let fall the already large accumulation of bills that must be examined and paid or investigated; he opened the book of property and investments, bewilderingly scattered and varied, of which he knew absolutely nothing, but of which he must inform himself fully. His confused mind glanced toward the mansion and its taking over, and the perplexing personal detritus of a life to be decently disposed. (He need not have worried about that, at least!) And he saw the thing not as a static task that could be shovelled at until it was all shovelled away. The thing

was in constant motion. There was no time to stop for breath.

Of course he could delegate much of this, most of it—he *must*! But how could he delegate until he understood it? Here was a slip from the bank that informed him of certain receipts from certain mysterious sources—a huge sum. What about that? It ought to be entered somewhere? Where? Marcel would know; but Marcel was gone. Such a sum ought not to lie idle: the thought revolted all Fred's business instincts. Where would he find time coolly to seek out and estimate proper investment?

He thrust aside the mass of papers and rested his forehead in his hands.

The door to his private office opened. Dort, the foreman of the stove works, entered with some question that seemed to him of vital importance. Fred did not understand clearly what it was about.

"You'll have to see me in the morning about that," he told Dort at last. "I'm too busy to go into it now."

The foreman withdrew reluctantly.

Fred shook himself and tried to think of what the man had said. He could not. The factories had suddenly lost their significance. That deposit slip from the bank showed a greater sum than the profits he had hoped from an entire year of operation. And he had put so much of his life into them! And was just topping the divide! This thing had knocked all his previous efforts into a cocked hat.

He picked up one of the sheets and sheets of figures and stared at them.

"Like a damn fool!" he said aloud.

He was simply paralyzed in his ideals and his philosophy of life. It was *astonishing*! He kept at it all the afternoon. He seemed merely to confuse himself. He supposed that in time he would straighten the thing out in his own mind, but just now it was in its unaccustomedness a hodge-podge. And he could make out of it nothing else.

After a time he gave it up. Perhaps things would not look so formidable after another night's sleep. He locked all the papers in his private safe and went over to the club. He thought he had accomplished nothing. As a matter of fact, he had opened his mind to realization, and he was at once appalled and discouraged.

The club proved unexpectedly difficult. No one seemed to

understand. At his entrance into the card room a shout went up.

"Here he comes!" cried Atkins jovially, "all wrapped round with thousand-dollar bills! Gosh, what a gay old dog you'll have to be now that you're a gentleman of leisure!"

They punched him in the ribs. He could not even punch back. Leisure!

III

He did not stay long at the club. Perhaps it would be better to go home, to play with Zozo. It was already after dark. He walked up the Hill slowly. He felt very tired.

Zozo was having supper, or being brushed, or having his teeth cleaned, or his mind washed, or something like that: he did not gather it clearly. Anyway, he was not available, nor did it occur to Fred to make him so. The System was inviolable. Mrs. Kirby was reported as being still out. So he groped to his study chair into which he sank with a heavy sigh. His body seemed drained of its last drop of energy; his mind was numb and blank.

Sometime later he aroused himself to become aware of another figure in the room.

"Hullo, Jim," he greeted, "how long you been here?"

"Oh, I just slipped in," replied Cousin Jim vaguely, striking a match for his old pipe. "Pretty big job, eh, Fred?" he enquired sympathetically.

Something inside Fred stirred to life at this first tiny evidence of understanding; and with the stir the hard tension relaxed ever so little.

"She's a whale," he confessed ruefully, "and the joke of it is I don't know where to begin."

"Begin on yourself," advised Cousin Jim unexpectedly, "after which tackle the first thing and do it as though it were the only thing."

"That's good advice," admitted Fred, "but, doggone it, there are so many first things!"

"I know. But it's your job now, my son, whether it's big or little. It'll work out easier than you think: those things always do."

Already Fred was feeling brisker, he could not have told why. Certainly Cousin Jim had offered no brilliantly constructive assistance. "I'll make out, I reckon," he said, reaching for a cigar. "And see here, Cousin Jim; I'm glad you came around.

I've been thinking of it off and on all day. This thing has come about very queerly. I've seen the copy of the will the old man destroyed and it made you a very handsome bequest, something over a quarter million. The old gentleman was very fond of you, Jim! and he used to enjoy your visits together, I believe, almost more than anything else he did around here."

"And Minnie could never make out why," supplemented Cousin Jim with a grin.

"Eh? Oh, no! Well, I can't see why what was evidently an accident should alter the situation. I just want you to know that I shall arrange that you get the original bequest as was evidently intended; that's all."

Cousin Jim started forward eagerly in his chair, thought better of his impulse, and sank back slowly. For a moment or so he puffed thoughtfully at his pipe.

"That is like you, Fred," he said at last.

"It's only fair," returned Fred.

"I am more glad than I can say that you feel so. Now I'm going to say something that will probably make you think I'm crazy—that is, even more crazy than you already think I am. As far as I personally am concerned I feel that the burning of that will was one of the narrow escapes of my life."

"Huh!" cried Fred.

"I don't *want* a quarter million dollars!" cried Cousin Jim with sudden vehemence. "Dog-gone it, I'd have to think about what I'd do with it."

"Oh, I could take care of it for you—or Pine would do it."

"It isn't that. I'd have to think of what to do with the income from it, and I haven't *time* for it. I've got every single thing in this world I want right now. I don't want to live any different. I'm perfectly satisfied with the way I'm living now."

"Well," Fred pointed out reasonably, "you don't have to live any different, unless you want to. But I can't see where the spare cash is going to hurt."

"It's the responsibility. If I had it I'd *have* to do something about it—you can see that. It won't do, Fred—for me."

"Well," commented Fred, "I believe, Jim, you're the only man on God's green earth who would talk that way."

"I expect I am," admitted Cousin Jim, "but I mean it; I really do. I told you you'd think I was crazy."

"I do," agreed Fred, "plumb crazy."

"Mind you," urged Cousin Jim, "I'm not a crank, even if I am crazy. I'm not saying that the chance money gives isn't a wonderful thing, one of the most wonderful things in the world. Only it isn't a wonderful thing for me. I have another job; and I'm satisfied with it, and interested in it, and I don't want it interfered with."

Fred threw up his hands with a comical gesture.

"I'd just like to know what job is ever interfered with by a little more money."

"Mine," replied Cousin Jim.

"And what in blazes is that?"

"Getting caught up with myself, as I've told you before."

Fred stared at Cousin Jim's simple and kindly face.

"Jim," said he, "you're a nut, just a plain common nut. If you weren't harmless you'd be locked up."

"Now be reasonable," urged Cousin Jim. "What would I do with any more money? I've got a house that just suits me, and two of the finest bird dogs in the state, and good grub and costly raiment."

"For one thing you could travel; you could go somewheres."

"Well, ain't I somewheres now?" demanded Cousin Jim with a grin.

Fred burst out laughing.

"Jim, you're a wonder!" was his comment.

Cousin Jim leaned forward and his voice took on a wheedling tone. One would have thought him a ten-year-old boy trying to extract some particular favour from a grown-up.

"Look here, Fred: you-all have got to have a Poor Relation. Never saw a rich family yet without a Poor Relation. Never read of one. Well, let me be the Poor Relation. By George, I'm the only relation you've got. It's *got* to be me!"

The front door opened and shut and excited feminine voices were heard in the front hall. Cousin Jim promptly arose.

"Lord! There's Minnie!" he exclaimed in a guarded voice. "I'll just sneak out through the window."

"What for? She'll want to see you. Stay for dinner," urged Fred.

"No," said Cousin Jim decidedly. "I'll wait until she's sober."

"*Sober!*" cried Fred.

"Sure. She's drunk as a lord now; can't you tell it by her voice?"

"*Drunk!*" repeated Fred on a rising voice.

Cousin Jim grinned down on him from his superior height.

"On prosperity," he explained.

He tiptoed to the window which he opened cautiously. Then with a final impish grin at Fred he stepped across the sill and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXX

I

IT WOULD seem to any reasonable person especially at that period that any man who had come into great wealth would feel a certain elation of spirit. Fred himself would have conceded that; and would have admitted that it was most unreasonable of him merely to feel depressed. He ascribed it to the fact that all of a sudden he felt tired, darn tired. The old job, into which he had put so many years of hard work; had suddenly been struck small and useless. The new job was so big that he couldn't see around it; he did not know where to begin.

The second morning he went down to the office with positive distaste. He made some figures on a scratch pad, then opened his safe and piled the estate papers on his desk. For some time he gazed at them without unbinding the tape. He touched his bell.

"Send for Dort," he commanded the boy who answered his ring. "Tell him I want to see him at once."

While awaiting his foreman, he leaned back in his chair idly, his mind vacant, almost numb. The door opened, and he came to with a start.

"Sit down, Dort," he commanded. "This new responsibility is going to be about all I can swing. The factories are out of the question for me at present. You have been with us from the start, and I think you know your business. From now on you will have entire charge as manager. I will have the proper papers drawn up to make you a junior partner."

Dort's sallow face flushed with pleasure, but he merely nodded.

"Thank you," he said after a moment. "I'll do my best to swing it."

"I'm sure of that. Now I want you to go ahead just as if I didn't exist. See what you can do. Perhaps, later, when I dig out from this mess, I'll have time to take a little personal interest again."

Dort started to speak, hesitated.

"What is it?" asked Fred.

"Only this. I don't know how it hits you, but if you really want to get out entirely I think I know people in Detroit who would be willing to buy. I feel I ought to tell you this before you go ahead with this partnership idea."

Fred's whole being recoiled in a panic at the bare idea. The Business was the one stable thing left in a shifting world. The fulfilment of his old dream was never dearer to him—the standardized Household Outfits complete; grades A to Z; all prices. It was one thing to *tie* to in the shifting chaos, the one stable thing in building new conditions.

"No! No!" he cried, so vehemently that Dort looked at him curiously, "I don't want to sell."

Dort went out. Bob Post with an imposing portfolio was announced.

Fred sighed and buckled down to business. Bob Post had energy and enthusiasm enough. This was nuts for him, not only because of the prospective increase of business for himself; but also because he found in these matters a foreign and exotic romance. Old Mr. Kirby's affairs were in fairly good method, but they were scattered and in charge of many people. The worst thing was that Fred had been able to find no formal list of the property. It would be necessary to compile one from the account books and from what correspondence was on file. A stupendous job! The bonds and stocks, of course, were a simple matter. There was, however, a considerable body of real property in both England and France; and Mr. Kirby also appeared to be interested as a sleeping partner in several business enterprises or more speculative "deals" abroad. Apparently all these matters were in the hands of solicitors or agents.

"You'll just have to write these people for as complete a description of each of these deals or properties as possible, together with all information they can give," concluded the young lawyer.

He went out, leaving Fred with yet more papers. The stenographer came in with the mail. Remittances: heavy. There were a lot of coupons needing to be cut and cashed, Fred reminded himself. The balance at the bank, already enormous, was becoming top-heavy. Every day's loss of interest meant—— He did some figuring and stared with dismay at the result. Incredi-

ble! He must see to it at once, instantly. Of course he could make arrangements for ordinary bank interest—if that had not already been done; but the difference between that and what a proper investment should bring was still appalling. Fred knew little of the investment market. He had never had anything to invest, except in his own business. It was a study in itself, which he must undertake—at once.

II

Minnie's reactions were not in the least depressant. Opportunities rather than responsibilities had offered themselves to her eager mind. She did not, as yet, even try to sort them out.

First of all, she had breakfast in bed. She did not particularly enjoy breakfast in bed, and this morning she was vibrantly seething with eagerness to be up and at it. But she seemed to get a peculiar pleasure from the thought that a week ago she would not have dared upset the domestics with such an irregularity, and that now she did not care a hoot about upsetting any amount of domestics. Cousin Jim had been right. She was drunk. She knew it perfectly, and she schooled herself to the idea that she must conceal her condition from others. No one must be able to say that she was "stuck up" or "put on airs." That was for the public. In private she allowed herself some latitude. For example, she summoned Camilla, and she stayed in bed until Camilla arrived. This was not long. Camilla, thrilled, responded promptly. Minnie conducted levee, and the ante-chamber was thronged with bepuffed and bepowdered and jewelled courtiers of whom the only carnate representative must be Camilla. From Camilla Minnie instinctively felt she did not need to conceal her condition: Camilla was temperamentally more or less drunk all the time.

The levee having passed off satisfactorily Minnie dropped her languid yet regal manner together with her lace negligee and got a move on her. In less than no time she was ready, and the two, chattering eagerly, were again on their way to the old mansion, with Marie occupying the front seat alongside Ezra.

The task before Minnie was, in its way, also a colossal one. Things must be selected, inventoried, packed away. Mr. Kirby's personal effects, even to his clothes, must be intelligently disposed. The question of the servants must be settled; and that of

a caretaker. The valuables must be sorted out and either stored safely or otherwise arranged for. The house was large and it was crammed from garret to cellar. But the magnitude and detail of the task did not depress Minnie. Far from it! She stood for a moment on the threshold and drew a long breath; then plunged in.

Soon everybody was busy on a definite job. Minnie was obeyed without open question. She had already assumed, and was diligently practising, a grand manner that must for public exhibition await the slow education of Little Falls.

Camilla was a good mark to talk at.

"There is a great responsibility here; I cannot help feeling it deeply." Minnie expressed the highly original thought with a sigh. "It has always seemed to me that something lacked in the vulgar idea of possession; it is so selfish and inward-looking. After all, wealthy people are no better than others, only naturally one's riches make one more prominent, more noticeable. What one of prominence does is a standard for so many! Wealth *does* increase the obligation of setting standards for others, Camilla dear. Those who are prominent because of their money focus attention, so to speak. What are we to offer to that attention—that's the question."

"You are so right, darling," murmured Camilla. "—Did you ever see more exquisite silk? I wonder what he did with things like this? It would make a love of a summer waist."

"Do take it and make one, Camilla dear." Minnie waved it languidly into the other's possession. She smiled serenely over the latter's ecstasies. Her agile mind was busy not so much with the actual material things she was going to accomplish—though they were grandiose and already expanding—but with the precise *type* she intended herself to become. It was necessary to adopt a type, which she differentiated sharply from a pose; and she explained a little of it to Camilla.

"It is stupid to be one of the standardized ruck," she pronounced. "Human beings are really all individual, different. If we had the courage of our convictions, instead of fearing being *outré*, we would reflect that individuality in our externals. But, instead, we try to make ourselves all exactly alike."

"That's so true, darling!" Camilla greeted this profound truth.

"I don't mean, of course, that one should be bizarre," Minnie

qualified. "Ages of breeding have evolved certain broad, wise conventions we should observe, defined certain limits. But within those limits why do we not show ourselves separately, individually for what we are?"

"Why not, Minnie dear? Tell me: you are so clever."

"Either because we are timid; or else because we have no money—or both," stated Minnie, who had every intention of telling her. "—Oh! I wonder if this vase is genuine *famille verte*? I wonder if it could be?—I'm going to break away from that. I have the courage; I can see clearly; and now I have the money. I feel I should stand for something, in myself."

"Oh, you will! You do!" cried Camilla fervently.

"I intend," stated Minnie, "to be a dominating influence in my world. And I don't mean that in the usual way. My world is going to be a world of discrimination, not the world of mere fashion, which after all is so easily and vulgarly obtainable."

Minnie was *exaltée*, basking in the warmth of her self-gratulation. Fred might be overcome; but not she! Her only suffering was from an indigestion of ideas. The type she was to become was already moulding her. Minnie played each rôle in life by actually changing her mental process; which is, of course, the effective way to play any rôle. Externally she was nothing new—as yet. Merely her old peculiarities were a trifle intensified: the languid trailing carriage of her body, the breadth of her "Eastern accent," the absence of clearly enunciated *r* in her speech. She had a spirit essentially vital, struggling always to move on. Now at last it seemed to her that she had discovered her power to progress; and she strained at the leash.

"I think," she stated, suddenly, "that it might be a good idea to go abroad for the period of mourning. Fred has never been abroad; it will do him good. There's one thing I'm going to do any way, I'm going to get rid of Martha. There's no sense in having such service when one can afford better."

"Why don't you keep the *chef*—what's his name?" suggested Camilla.

"That was just what I was thinking of doing. And I'm *through* going about the streets without proper equipage. Ezra has been with us a long time and Zozo is fond of him, but he simply will have to go unless he will wear a proper livery—with a cockade," stated Minnie, mentioning a heretofore Lost Cause.

"He can always get a good place," said Camilla.

"It's in just such small details that one can set the standard we were speaking of. One should be *individual*. One should choose and make one's own an individual colour, a perfume, a notepaper. They should be *especial*, one's *own*, so that no one else can have them or adopt them. That sounds like a small thing, and it is a small thing in one way. But don't you see it gives weight to the bigger things?"

Camilla said she saw, and observed that Minnie was wonderful.

"It's the same way with manner," went on Minnie, picking up and laying down again one after the other the small *objets d'art* in a cabinet. "It's perfectly silly to call it pose. Of course it might be pose in some people and if it is not done right. But there is nothing more distinctive than an individual manner. One should think clearly on such things, not leave them to chance. One should clarify one's standard of example."

With a remnant of canniness she did not pursue this thought aloud. Beneath Camilla's chatter and her own perfunctory reply she was silent, contemplating more intimately her idea. The languid trailing type undoubtedly best suited her appearance. She must cultivate that, and remember it always in spite of the quick leaping vitality within her—yes, that was the most effective: she must begin to insist on dressing for dinner; now she could and would get herself the gold evening slippers.

They had lunch at the Mansion. Throughout the rest of the day Minnie, critically and experimentally, practised on the new manner. It went big. Indeed, so successful was it that shortly Minnie was believing in it herself and was waving a lily-white hand weariedly, and talking of the thing I adoah, my deah! and of the things I positively cannot enduah! Camilla lapped it up devotedly. She liked things harmoniously consistent, and some sort of sniffy-rich and unusual manner obviously belonged with Twelve Millions. The old Minnie had not had Twelve Millions: it was gratifying of her to supply an appropriate new Minnie to fit. Later in the day, as she sat and talked to the busily packing Camilla, another idea struck her.

"Of course, my dear," she developed it, "I am going to need a tremendous lot of help. So many details! I could not possibly attend to them all. I shall need someone to help me—as you are helping me now—you unselfish dear! How would you like to be the one?"

"Of course I will do all I can for you, Minnie; you know that," Camilla assured her, looking up from where she was kneeling by a deep box.

Before going on Minnie surveyed her a moment, reviewing her impulse. Poor Camilla was rather a guy with her too-yellow straw hair, like something to pack around breakables; and her cheeks the unholy pinky-pink of jeweller's cotton; and the fine almost invisible lines in her face, like the lines on the skin of an apple that has just begun to wither. And her home-made gowns with the look of coloured cheesecloth, and her inappropriately large picture hats! But she was so capable; so adaptable; so full of enthusiasm and energy; so adoring of Minnie; she was such a wonderful mark to talk at! Minnie felt herself entirely competent to attend to external modification.

"I meant permanently," she explained, "be my social secretary."

"Oh!" cried Camilla, wide-eyed, "I don't know anything about it! Do you think I could?"

"Why, of course you could. You would live at home at first, but later, when my plans develop, I think I would have you live with us. You could relieve me of a great deal. I don't know much about salaries, but I can find out. Matters of wardrobe I should attend to; for of course, Camilla dear, I should want you dressed appropriately."

The last remark might be taken two ways. Minnie meant it one way; but she was perfectly certain that Camilla would take it the other.

"Oh, but Minnie!" cried Camilla, "I wouldn't want to be *paid!*"

"Of course you should be paid. How absurd!" Minnie overrode her briskly. "Such a thing would have to be a business proposition. Don't you suppose I realize that you will be giving me much that I couldn't possibly pay for or find elsewhere?"

The latter sop to Camilla's sentiment fetched her, as Minnie knew it would.

"I'd love to try," she agreed.

They did not leave off until nearly dark. And when Jean finally closed the door after them he closed in for safe keeping most of the new Minnie. She was much too clever to turn herself loose full power on the general public. Even the glamour of the Twelve Millions would not have prevented people from saying that Minnie Kirby was putting on airs. It called for

gradual accustoming, like turning cold water into a hot bath, so nobody would notice anything especial at any one moment.

III

The result of all this was ready to be dumped whole on Fred, who had come home tired and drawn, wishing only peace and a cigar. At first his wearied mind paid little attention to the numberless details of arrangement Minnie narrated. What did he care what they did with vases or silks or rugs or such things? Minnie was perfectly competent to attend to all that. But he sat up and took notice when Minnie made the European proposal. His immediate reaction was all against it. He made little impression with his argument.

"That's perfect nonsense," Minnie told him, when he informed her that now less than ever could he get away. "That's perfect nonsense," she repeated to his further objection that things would go to pot without him; and added, "and you know it."

Fred detailed patiently a little something of the task that confronted him; and pointed out that any way they had not the ready money for such a trip.

"Ready money!" cried Minnie, astounded. "How can that be?"

Fred explained that though he might indeed be the sole heir, the estate would not come into legal possession until the will was probated; that probate took a long time and much hard detailed labour. Minnie was silenced. Fred went to bed early quite convinced that he had settled that point.

But next noon he discovered his mistake. Minnie had taken time off from her fascinating pursuits to inform herself. She had visited with Bob Post at his office, and she had interviewed Pine at the bank. She was primed and ready.

"Too busy to get away?" she interrupted a repetition of his excuses of the previous evening. "How? You've turned over your old business to Dort. And you know perfectly well that all this probate court business is lawyer's work. All you have to do is to give Bob Post your power of attorney."

"But you don't *understand*," repeated Fred, "if I'm to handle this property I've got to get acquainted with it, to know what it is——"

But here Minnie had him.

"How about Uncle Zeke's European interests, then?" she de-

manded triumphantly. "You ought to go see about them. How do *you* know how those Frenchmen and Englishmen are handling them?"

"They can wait," muttered Fred; "they're going along all right—at least, they're going on the way they have been going on for some time. A little longer won't make any difference. Besides, as I told you, we haven't the money."

"We can get it," she countered. "You can get an interim allowance from the Court. Bob Post says so." And then, being a good strategist, she quitted the room on some plausible excuse.

Fred, left to himself, felt his resentment and opposition slowly dying down. The day had again wearied him with its mass of detail. He felt more than ever like chucking the whole thing and getting out. For an instant he queried the impulse uneasily as a sort of running away; but the cry of his instincts for repose, for an opportunity of orientation, spoke louder. After all, what Minnie had said was no more than the truth. He *could* get away. The legal steps could be taken in his absence. His old business was in good hands. In his heart he knew that his financial objections must be flimsy. The sole heir to Twelve Millions could raise cash. In an hour he had decided. But he imagined his decision was swung not by the fact that he wanted to run away, but by the foreign property. Perhaps he *should* investigate that personally—of *course* he should! It was typical of him that he needed just such an excuse.

When Minnie came back he rather grudgingly admitted that it might conceivably be within the bounds of possibility. She was a wise general and made his capitulation very easy for him: there was no use in rubbing it in. She still further cheered him by informing him that she would see to all arrangements. Truth to tell the multitudinous necessities as to packing away things, closing the two houses, arranging servants, letters of credit, tickets, and all the rest of it, had been no inconsiderable ingredient of his hesitation.

"You have enough to do," Minnie told him energetically. "You attend to your business, and when the time comes you will just step right on the train without a thought even of your tooth-brush!"

"That's good," he sighed.

"I'm going to take Camilla Stearns along," announced Minnie, without preamble. In the old pre-plutocratic days Fred would

have hit the ceiling at the bare idea of even a week's visit from the bouncing and effervescent Camilla. He had been heard to say with all the emphasis of one untrained in the polished courts of kings that she gave him the willy-gobbles; and to add that in the avoidance of willy-gobbles murder was one of the least things he would do. And here Minnie was calmly introducing the Ecstatic One as a permanent member of the household.

But now Fred took it dully. It was only one more thing—and that not the most disagreeable—of the many that were crowding his altered world. He was tired. One more did not seriously matter.

"Oh, for the love of Pete!" was his comment; but on a note of resigned acquiescence.

Exactly the same formula was employed by Zozo when the news was broken to him that he was to be soon favoured with a second trip abroad. At first he declined the arrangement flatly, offering as solution of his personal problem a residence with Amanda while his parents were away. Convinced at last that this and a dozen hastily improvised alternative schemes were untenable, he repeated his father's remark.

"Oh, for the love of Pete!" said he; but his note was of enraged submission to tyranny.

It is to be noted that Zozo had temporarily retired from the centre of the plot.

CHAPTER XXXI

THEY sailed soon after; Fred, Minnie, Camilla, Zozo, and Angélique. The whole trip lasted several months. It had little real effect in making a dent on anybody's inner consciousness.

Fred took it as a spell of bad weather, especially after he discovered that foreign methods were not going to permit him to do much about estate business in the time at his disposal. The solution was, after all, in his own office at home! He was an earnest traveller, and insisted on going to every spot starred in Baedeker; but this zeal was only because he felt that if he did the thing properly now, he would not have to come back again! He took due precautions, and was not too uncomfortable. It was necessary to examine your change carefully and be sure to lay in plenty of cigars when you found good ones. And he had constructed himself a wonderful egg-shaped aura into which he retired in case of Camilla. It shed all external impacts. He had to hump up a bit to remain inside it, and of course it deprived him of all other outside impressions, as well as Camilla, when he inhabited it; but take it all in all it was cozy and snug, like a pup tent in a storm, and all he had to do was to scrooch down philosophically and let her rain. From the outside it looked grumpy; but it was not really so at all. But good old U. S. A. for Fred!

Nor was Minnie dented, though she took on a high polish. Mainly she acquired things—*objets d'art*, curios, furniture, antiques, clothes—things to be shown off at home. But, most important, she became possessed of a slogan. There is nothing like a slogan both as a driving force and as a focus of the same. It was presented to her by an artistic and artful young man named Southworth, an American architect, picked up as a chance acquaintance in Avignon and found to be particularly understanding and sympathetic with Minnie's ideas. He told her she should "create a monument to her taste." Having sowed which seed, he tactfully left it to sprout. It sprouted instantly and vigorously.

As for Zozo, this trip merely accentuated the boredom produced by the other.

CHAPTER XXXII

I

MINNIE came back to Little Falls with a confidence in herself that could not have been acquired by any stay-at-home tactics. She had seen the wide world: she possessed a standard by which to measure. And, strangely enough, while she herself was full stature to that measure, all of Little Falls fell slightly below it. There had, as Kipling says, "something gone small with the lot." Minnie's ambition to be the leader had automatically been fulfilled. She saw her former attitude of deprecation in equality as absurd. The expedience of circumspection was also absurd. What if somebody *did* say that Minnie Kirby was putting on airs? They'd get over it.

So she greeted the little gathering assembled on the station platform with no abatement of the regally languid though gracious manner; nor did she spare them a slurred *r* or a broad *a*.

"It was so *sweet* of you to come!" she cried, "and I am so glad to see you all. After all, there *is* no place like home!"

While the commonplaces flew back and forth they took her in avidly, every detail of her from head to foot, for they realized that this must be at last the very latest from absolutely the primal source. Later they would ask her questions, but now their eyes must serve. Even Camilla, tactfully subdued for once, came in for her share of covert inspection. Zozo and Fred followed stolidly, almost unnoticed.

With much self-absorbed blocking of commerce, and after several narrow escapes from demolition, the swarm gyrated at length to the sidewalk where Ezra waited with the open carriage. Minnie mounted to the back seat and faced them all gaily where they clustered below her.

"I've brought back heaps of the most fascinating things," she cried; "you'll just love them! Clothes, stacks of clothes—and other things. You must all come and see them. It was *sweet* of you to come down."

This should have been the effective curtain speech. Ezra should here have driven the Queen away—dashing by choice—leaving her adoring subjects waving their adieux. Unfortunately, Fred was occupied in trying to stow in the little victoria not only himself and Zozo—Camilla was already seated to the left of her sovereign, as be seemed a lady-in-waiting—but the various articles of hand baggage. The thing therefore hung fire until Minnie could no longer restrain herself.

“For goodness sake, Fred, why don’t you send them up in a cab with Angélique?” she cried at last.

Fred had forgotten Angélique. The idea of a cab had not occurred to him, with Ezra there. Cabs in Little Falls were expensive—oh, hang it, what of it? He had forgotten. He removed the hand baggage from the victoria and was about personally to escort it and Angélique to a cab, when Minnie again interposed.

“Get in,” she commanded Fred, and she could not keep the sharpness out of her voice. “Angélique will attend to that.” She shot a volley of French at the maid.

“*Bien, madame,*” the latter replied.

At last the equipage was enabled to roll away. The effect was marred.

Minnie stared at Fred’s thick back alongside Ezra on the front seat. Her clear brain saw that it was going to be like this, in greater or lesser degree, world without end. It was going to be very difficult to change Fred. She realized that if she could not alter him, it would be foolish of her to try to dress him in a part. She must fit him in exactly as he was, begin at once to create a Fred-legend of the bluntly sincere, heart-of-gold, rugged direct type. Might not be a bad foil to some of the opposities in herself——

They were turning in at the driveway, and Zozo was becoming articulate in recognition of familiar things. Jean met them at the door wreathed in discreet and mannerly smiles. At a glance Minnie saw that the house was spick and span and as ready for occupancy as though she had never gone away. The picture of herself returning from even a short absence in the past flashed across her memory—the incompetent servants, the cleaning, the unpacking, the unrolling of rugs, the dust. Her nostrils expanded as she breathed deep in this simple luxury of having things done, and of the atmosphere of deference created by bowing serv-

ants ranged to greet her, offering their discreet felicitations over her return. Only the tiny hall, the commonplace furnishings—yes, they were commonplace—the banal architecture suddenly cramped her expanding spirit. Southworth and his slogan came into her mind, and a single French word—*mesquine*.

The *chef* and Maurice had vanished. Camilla and Zozo had disappeared in pursuance of some unwonted eagerness of the latter's over certain nursery belongings suddenly remembered. Fred had wandered in to his den where he was much interested at finding some of his cigars in an open receptacle on the smoking table, but in perfect condition. He had one in his hand and was pinching its wrapper.

"It's just as soft," he marvelled. "I don't see how it kept that way. It's as if it were just out of a humidior."

"It probably is," she said carelessly. "Jean must have got them out for you."

"Well, what do you think of that!" admired Fred.

A fire was crackling in the grate. He lighted the cigar and sank into his old leather chair.

"By George, and here's the *News*!" he cried.

"Jean is a good man, too good a man to lose," agreed Minnie. She did not sit down, but moved restlessly here and there. In a moment she intended to go upstairs where instinctively she knew that a bath and clean things and an attentive and skilful maid awaited her. But first she must get rid of her idea.

"I think, as soon as we can get around to it, we'd better move down to the old mansion," she said abruptly.

"What?" cried Fred.

"Yes," she hastened on before he could recover. "To be sure, it is not in the best part of town; but it has large grounds, and dignity, and is very comfortable. At least it will give us the room we need. We are going to be dreadfully cramped here."

"But," cried Fred, dismayed, "this is our home. Why, we've spent years getting it just the way we wanted it—why——"

"Yes, I know"—she cut him short—"and it has done us very well. But circumstances have altered. Both of us are going to have greater responsibilities. Why, take the mere question of servants—you can see for yourself what a comfort real service is; you've just had an instance of it. And where are you going to put them? You can't expect first-class people to be satisfied with our servants' quarters."

This was turning his own guns on him when he did not even know they had been captured. Fred's most frequently squelched complaint had always been that the cubby-holes everybody considered good enough for servants were not good enough for a decent dog.

"And we are crowded upstairs here." Minnie pursued her advantage. "We have always been, though we have made the best of it. Where do you think we are going to put all the things we bought abroad?"

Fred fired up feebly and was understood to mutter something disparaging in which the word "artistic" was clearly audible.

"Now the old mansion——" Minnie was continuing, when she was interrupted.

"Hullo, folks, hullo!" greeted Cousin Jim from the doorway. "How were all the kings and dukes when you left them? Glad to get back?"

Minnie bit her lip with vexation, then smiled.

II

The move was made with an expedition that surprised not only Fred but Little Falls as well. Minnie saw no occasion for delay; quite the contrary, since she wanted a sufficiently commodious showroom for her new things. There were a few private views of the clothes, of course; in the "spare" bedroom of the Hill house, to just a few intimates—enough to spread abroad an impression of richness without assuring public certainty of details. But both Minnie's official appearances and her promised display of treasures must await the transfer to the Mansion.

So efficiently were these operations conducted that within a week the change was made. Fred was out of town on business over one night. When he returned Ezra drove him, not to the old house on the Hill, but to the Mansion. Parenthetically, this was almost Ezra's last appearance. The parting of the ways was sign-posted by that disputed cockade; but in reality that was not the real question. Ezra was simply no longer in the picture.

Fred was considerably nonplussed at this violent and unexpected uprooting. He could not have defined what he expected, but it was something more in the nature of a gradual withdrawal. Minnie scorned his halting statement of this thought.

"If we're going to move, why not *move?*" she pointed out

reasonably. "What is to be gained by delay? It was all decided. And I've worked hard to spare you all trouble in the matter, because I know you have all you should attend to. I thought you'd be so pleased!"

"Oh, I am—I am," Fred hastened to say. "Only—well, you see—after all——"

He did not expose the secret sentiment which was back of his feeling.

"Come and see what I've accomplished," Minnie struck in, taking his arm.

They made the tour of the place; and Fred, in spite of himself, could not but admire. The mechanical appliances and conveniences especially interested him; and though he looked a little askance at some of the more ornamental features, which looked suspiciously "artistic," his heart warmed over the discovery that, in the back part of the house, he had been assigned a place all his own.

"You can have your men in here to play whist and smoke your heads off," she said brightly, "and no one will have a word to say."

Here Fred found all his personal belongings, even to the old leather chair. Nothing had been thrown away. Opening the little corner closet he disclosed even the old hat he liked to wear around the garden, and which Minnie had threatened with destruction times without number. Here it was, saved, and many other like treasures. This forbearance had been shrewdly calculated by Minnie to soften the blow; and it succeeded to a great extent. Subconsciously, part of Fred's reluctance had been the fear that a move would afford a good excuse to deprive him of some of the most disreputable of his treasures. Altogether Fred was not displeased by his inspection of the lower story. It was not as "artistic" and unlivable as he had feared.

They ascended the stairs.

"This," said Minnie, throwing open the door, "is the only room I have changed much. There was nothing really feminine enough for a boudoir as Mr. Kirby had arranged things." Spots of colour had marked her cheeks—those spots of colour which with her always heralded expected battle.

Fred stepped in and looked around. He felt clumsy and awkward amid these pale colours and soft fabrics. It did not have a practical *feel* to him. He could not imagine being comfortable

and at ease there, though he appreciated its charm. His eye fell on the daintily ruffled bed.

"We'll have to get another bed," said he. "We'll never be able to sleep in that thing."

Minnie glanced at it.

"Why?" she asked.

"It's too small."

"I don't think so," she said casually. "Here's the bathroom. It's very nice: I have always wanted a needle spray."

A faint line had appeared between Fred's eyes; he was looking about him.

"Where am I to keep my things?" he asked.

"Your room is down the hall," replied Minnie, still casually.

"It would be better adjoining, of course, but short of tearing out the walls it couldn't be arranged. It's only a step."

"My room!" repeated Fred.

"Of course. You really don't want us to crowd in together now that we don't have to, do you?"

"We always have."

"Because we have had no space to do otherwise. I think it will be much nicer each to have his own closets and bathroom and space to move around—you can smoke in your own room," she added. She was trying elaborately for the casual note, and finding it difficult in face of Fred's hurt puzzlement. She took his arm and drew it to her. "We can always go visiting, you know," she murmured to him. "Now come see how nicely I've fixed you up."

He was completely nonplussed, but he did not know what to do about it. It was as though Minnie had been suddenly withdrawn, snatched backward. Their relations had changed, become tinged with a sort of ceremonial quality. His feet dragged down the hallway after Minnie's hurrying, not in reluctance, but in the puzzled necessity of adjustment.

"There!" she cried with a forced gaiety, throwing the door open. "What do you think of that? Don't ever dare say your wife doesn't look after you, sir!"

But whatever the masculine attractions of the undoubtedly well-appointed quarters might have been, Fred for the moment saw none of them. His attention was entirely centred on the fact that there was a strange man in the room. He was a small, solemn, bald-headed person, and he was engaged in brushing some

of Fred's new London clothes and bestowing them on hangers in the closet. On the appearance of the Kirbys he ceased this occupation and stepped forward.

"At what time will you change, sir?" he enquired.

Fred merely stared.

"About seven," Minnie interposed quickly.

The stranger shut the closet and unobtrusively effaced himself. Fred loweringly watched him go.

"Who is that?" he demanded again of Minnie as soon as the door had closed.

"Middleton, your valet," Minnie told him.

Fred was silent for perhaps ten seconds. Here was something personal to himself on which he could offer battle. The matter of the separate bedrooms he had felt himself unable to combat. "I don't want a valet," said he.

"Of course you must have a valet; everybody who is anybody and can afford it has a valet."

"Now look here!" exploded Fred, "I'm still able to put on my pants without outside help."

"Don't be vulgar," Minnie supplied.

"Well, what I mean is, I wouldn't know what to do with him. I don't *need* him. I don't want anybody fussing around me. I tell you——"

Minnie set herself competently to deal with this crisis. She was clever enough to see that in it she was in reality meeting Fred's opposition to the whole altered scheme, including the separate bedrooms.

"You don't have to do anything with him: he knows his business. Who do you think is going to polish your shoes and press your clothes and do the thousand and one things of the sort about the place that I don't suppose you even know *are* done?"

He opened his mouth to reply, but she swept on.

"I have done most of them in the past, because it has been necessary, and I have been glad to do them, as you know. But now that it is no longer necessary, I don't intend to continue doing them."

"I don't want you to," countered Fred, "and I don't remember that you ever did black my shoes or press my clothes."

"No, of course not, personally; but I planned and arranged and did other things so that Ezra or Martha or the second girl could and would do *them*."

"Well, it seems to me we've got enough servants around the place to do the few simple things I need."

"Who?" demanded Minnie flatly.

"Good Lord!" cried Fred, "any of these lazy lummoxes! What in blazes do they do all day?"

Fred learned something of the type of service that goes with a raised standard of living, for already, under Minnie's arranging, the establishment had been pushed up into the parasitic class with internal and rigid social distinctions of its own. Fred looked amazedly on a perfect example of specialization. No; Jean could not do the boots because he was major domo; and Maurice could not do the boots because he was houseman; nor could the maids do the boots, because no maids had ever done boots; nor could the coachman do the boots because of his complete ignorance of boots and his unimpeachable dignity. Somehow boots seemed to have become the symbol of this contest.

"Well, doggone it, I can black 'em myself: I've done it before. Or I can get it done at the barber shop for ten cents!" cried Fred, "and, anyway, if it's so darn undignified for all these other mutts that they'll leave if they smell shoeblacking, how is it that this peewee upstairs condescends to lower himself?"

"Because that is part of his duties," explained Minnie patiently.

"Does he blow my nose for me?" enquired Fred.

"Don't be vulgar." Minnie felt it was time to close the discussion. "Now, Fred, the household after all is my affair; and if I'm to run it, I must do it my way. That is my business. I do not try to interfere with yours."

"But I tell you I don't *like* anybody fussing about me!" Fred repeated.

"And I tell you, you needn't have him fussing about you any more than you wish," said Minnie.

Resentful, but subdued, Fred said no more. He followed Minnie during the rest of the inspection almost unseeingly. To be sure he made some sort of appropriate comment when actually forced to it; but he was in reality wholly occupied with his own thoughts and emotions. When released he made a bee line for his familiar old chair in the "den" downstairs, where he smoked a moody cigar. By and by he reluctantly concluded he'd better wash up for dinner. Middleton was again in his room. He retreated. At the end of another half hour, he tried again. The

valet still held the fort. Fred went in. Damn it all, a man must wash his hands! And he wanted to get some papers out of his travelling bag.

On the bed lay his evening clothes and a suit of clean underwear. The bag had evidently been unpacked, for his papers and small personal belongings had been neatly arranged on a tabouret.

"I have drawn your bath, sir," suggested the man. "A half-hour to dinner, sir."

Fred stared at the evening clothes. Minnie had said nothing of a party, but it was very obvious that he was expected to put them on. Middleton stood waiting. Evidently he fully expected to help Fred undress himself, and at the thought Fred growled to himself angrily. He stood for a moment undecided.

"Get me a cigar," he mumbled at last.

The incredible Middleton instantly produced one from somewhere as though by magic, and struck a match which he held deferentially for Fred's use. That stratagem had failed. Fred was forced to light the cigar. He must try again. His eye fell on the papers on the tabouret.

"Take these down and leave them on my desk," he commanded.

The moment the man was outside the door, Fred tiptoed over and turned the key.

III

For all his hard and limited practical sense, Fred was more of a sentimentalist about things, as such, than Minnie. With the removal to the Mansion she had turned her back definitely on the old life, and faced joyously the new. That door was closed. But the new as yet had not revealed its vistas of attractiveness to Fred's slower perception. Up to now it meant to him hard work, and worry, and responsibility, and uncomfortable elaborations, like Middleton, to which he must become accustomed. After he had struggled into his evening clothes he found there was no party at all! Why in blazes should one dress up when there was no party? But he learned that it was expected, thenceforward, with a battle involved, in case of non-compliance, which he had not the energy to face. The past, closed to Minnie, possessed for Fred many regrets.

Next day in pretense of examining with a view of sale he went up alone to the house on the Hill and spent an hour aimlessly wandering about the place. It made him sad. Although it had

been unoccupied for so short a time it had already the impersonal and abandoned air of desertion. The interior of the house was cold; the rooms echoed. The poor outgrown ballroom, once so impressive, looked forlorn. Fred retreated hastily. Nor outside did he gain comfort. Little things struck constantly at his memory for attention. He found himself, as of old, gauging and estimating the things that were out of repair and should be attended to. He lingered for some time, puttering about, peering aimlessly into the dusty little "office" where Ezra's stove stood cold; trying the cellar door's hasps; standing vacant-eyed at the head of the infinitesimal terrace that had cost so much planning and figuring and had been such a triumph of execution. They were symbols of a life that had passed as utterly as last winter's snows.

CHAPTER XXXIII

FRED returned to his office without any zest. He had a big job there, and he knew it. He had never minded big jobs; but somehow this was one rather of preparation than accomplishment. He supposed that after he had got this huge tangle of property listed and understood and in shape, he would begin to *do* something. To Fred's constructive nature this was not really doing something; it was getting organized to do something. And, he sighed wearily, it was one hell of a job! The satisfactions of wealth had not been many for Fred as yet.

Minnie, however, had zest enough for two. She quite definitely and systematically proceeded to arrange things. In a small room on the ground floor she had installed a very workman-like desk with a filing case and typewriter. She realized perfectly that she was, in her way, going to conduct an actual business. While Fred was piecemeal growing into realization and piecemeal constructing expedients, Minnie visualized the situation as a whole and made her frame.

That very morning she called Camilla into her "office."

"It is time," she said, "that we got some sort of a system into this part of it."

She paused to arrange her thoughts.

"There are three things that I want to turn over to you especially: mail, the supervision of bills and checks, and the keeping track for me of my engagements, social and otherwise. I can see my days are going to be very full. Those three things are your essential duties that must always be done. Only when they are out of the way will you go on to other things that will define themselves as they come up—arrangement of flowers, perhaps seeing some of my callers—all sorts of things."

"Yes," breathed Camilla. Her exuberance of manner was sunk beneath this glassy sea of Minnie's competence.

"You will sort the mail," went on Minnie, "and you will use your judgment on what to bring to my attention."

Camilla's brow was corrugated with anxiety. This social secretary business had until now been a joy-ride; but the vehicle was suddenly displaying truckish tendencies.

"Oh," she cried in distress, "I wouldn't dare take the responsibility. I am not fit for this position. You ought really to have a trained secretary."

"Nonsense," rejoined Minnie briskly. "You'll get the hang of it in no time. We'll work at it together for a while. Bring me everything you do and I will criticize and revise. Here's the batch this morning. See what you make of it. Sort it out. Reply to it, and bring your replies to me."

She ceded her place to Camilla and went about household affairs. There, too, were flocks of minutiae awaiting her arrangement. Theoretically, the establishment should be running automatically under Jean, who alone should be responsible to her for his supervision. But the theory would work only for one who knew the technique in detail and so possessed knowledge with which to check Jean. That technique must be acquired. The thing would in due course be made a simple background by knowledge and habit, of course; but it had to be learned and practised.

That seemed to be true of everything connected with this new and expanded life. Details buzzed like mosquitoes. She brushed them aside, but they came back in swarms. With time they would become systematized and ticketed and made to run themselves. Minnie had found herself learning many new things, often from the very beginning, studying them as she used to study in college, but with infinitely more concentration. When all this was going, with her, as with Fred, real life was to begin. But, unlike Fred, she already saw her job as a whole.

She returned to Camilla after two hours.

While the once-exuberant damsel stood anxiously by, she scanned the results of her labours.

"Not so bad," she commented at last. "Sit down and we'll go over them together." She glanced at her watch. "I have fifteen minutes."

Minnie found herself giving a course in polite letter writing.

"You must not only copy these," she concluded, "but you must study them, try to catch my style. I wonder if you could take dictation?"

They tried out Camilla's heretofore theoretical shorthand. She found she could take Minnie's dictation perfectly. But Minnie, to her vexation, found she could not dictate. The result was incredibly stilted.

"Never mind," she concluded. "Do it the other way. And every morning have a typewritten list of my engagements ready for me."

She left the room and at once thrust the social-secretary problem from her mind. Marie was waiting to array her in suitable garments for a sally into outside activities. She had just time to make it. Jean waylaid her in the hall with a problem that could not be postponed. Tom, who was now "head gardener" with a staff of one, ambushed her by the carriage. It was all exciting, stimulating; whirling vibrant life with the blower on; a little unreal, like a not-too-unpleasant dream from over-feeding. As she settled herself in the carriage to arrange her mind for the next task, she realized that she had not had an opportunity to see Zozo that morning. If things were to go on like this she must arrange a definite hour for him.

The committee meeting took rather longer than she had expected—there was a silly long-winded woman who insisted on talking out of order, and the chairwoman had not decision enough to handle the situation. Finally Minnie interposed sharply. She did not wish to do so, but her thoughts were on her next engagement. These people did not realize how crowded her hours were. As it was, she had barely time to rush home and prepare for Mrs. McAllister's luncheon. She arrived late; as she arrived late everywhere. Once she overheard a sotto-voce ill-natured comment on this peculiarity; something to the effect that she thought her money privileged her to keep people waiting. Good heavens! she didn't want to be late! What could they know of the demands of a life like hers?

Fred came home at twilight, looking a little down. He found Minnie going over the revised result of the morning lesson with Camilla. Minnie looked up at him brightly.

"Hard day at the office?" she asked.

"Busy," returned Fred. "Where's Zozo?"

"In the nursery with Angélique, I suppose." Then, as he turned away, "Don't forget we're dining with the Pines this evening—half-past seven."

Fred grunted as he went out. Dog-gone it, he didn't want

to dine out with the Pines! He was tired! But Little Falls had begun one of its orgies of entertainment, passing the stranger-guests from dinner to dinner, each more elaborate than the last. And the stranger-guests were themselves! Themselves, by gad, who had lived there always!

CHAPTER XXXIV

I

IT MAY have seemed from the foregoing that a considerable change had affected the Kirby family, and that is true; but the greatest change of all has not yet been recorded. Zozo must not be forgotten.

Two things coincided as major influences, with a half-dozen or so others in contribution. He emerged from the immediate dominance of Angélique, and he cherished a hidden ambition and worshipped a secret god.

The escape from Angélique was a matter of expedience rather than settled policy. Angélique had, during the trip abroad, become necessary to Minnie's personal comfort. She was much handier than Marie had ever been, much more intelligent, quicker at the uptake. On the return to Little Falls it was not unnatural that Minnie should discover that Zozo was really getting too old for a nursemaid.

This new dispensation afforded Zozo a freedom he had never before enjoyed. His hours were still laid out for him to a large extent, and a fine mediæval obedience, without thought, was still expected of him, but he was not under constant supervision. And this new freedom happened to correspond in time with an added social opportunity. Thus:

The old Kirby place had several distinct fascinations for the children of the town. It was distant, it had heretofore been inaccessible. One could stare through the bars of its fence at half-guessed lures and splendours, but one could by no ingenuity enter. That had been tried by many adventuresome knights errant. It was situated, like an island, in a dangerous and fascinatingly turbulent neighbourhood of "toughs," "hoodlums," "gangs," so that the possibilities of war, of raid, of capture, or of an even more delightful surreptitious peace forbidden by the powers were numerous and intriguing. And, finally, it possessed natural advantages.

Its slopes were ideal for coasting or rolling downhill; its little pond for skating or sailing boats or splashing. Its trees were full of nuts in season. Its autumn leaves lay thick for the gathering. Its facilities for games of all sorts were unexcelled. Its possibilities of exploration were unexampled. Heretofore these charms had been locked away. Now they had been made available. The only drawback was that Zozo went with them. So, quite suddenly, Zozo found himself one of a "gang." For the first time in his life he was associating freely with his own kind. He exhibited to unthinking comrades what they considered a finished appraisable article called Zozo Kirby.

This creature was neither wholly desirable nor wholly negligible. He had a good notion of his own importance: no human being could have been impressed for years with his own position as a Kirby heir without that. At the same time he was almost painfully diffident about sports and games and rough play. This, too, was egocentric—he was afraid of making a fool of himself. The consequence was that, after the first few days, his place was as an unconsidered tolerated member of the rank and file, except for an occasional flare-up when the Power of Wealth asserted itself, and the natural leaders diplomatically—but very temporarily—fell back. When they came forward again, they put Zozo in his place, with emphasis. And Zozo, self-distrustful because he was beginning his social education so late in life, fell back meekly enough.

Still, he had a pretty good time—a wildly good time as compared to the old days. It was freedom of a limited sort. The most mortifying thing was to be summoned by one of the tremendous and impressive servants. Then he had to leave his companions—like a baby—while they went whooping and untrammelled into space. (Tom ejected them promptly when "the young master" was withdrawn. Tom would very well have liked to drown them neatly, once and for all.) They had definite union hours of incarceration at school, outside of which—save for occasional and resented sequestrations *in re* wood boxes or weeding the lawn or looking after baby brother—they were free as the wind. Zozo had no union hours. He resented this, and wanted to go to school, but his mother disbelieved in schools, feared the contamination of *hoi polloi*. (Her too circumscribed disapprovals were already driving Zozo to surreptitious acquaintance through the bars, as it were, of the old place.)

II

All this flowed from the withdrawal of Angélique. The other influence was not as yet so definite and concrete. Its importance was for later. In Paris, for one gaudy week, he had reaped the advantage of Angélique's passing infatuation for a lordly being practising a then-new profession. During the period of their dalliance he had, almost unwatched, been permitted to adore and even to finger the mechanism of a new deity. On three memorable occasions he had ecstatically but cannily watched the operation of that deity. For the first time he appreciated as of value his child's fluency in French, for he asked many questions and received many replies. The man was a chauffeur, and he proudly conducted one of that rare new breed, a horseless carriage. Here, could someone discriminating have been there to understand, was the first indication of Zozo's bent. For all his tender years and limited knowledge, he grasped with astonishing quickness the basic principles of the mechanism. And he carried away with him a consuming passion sublimated to what seemed to him an impossible dream. Some day, in a future so remote that it was well beyond the circumference of possibility, he would own such a thing. In the meantime all other possible objects of desire became negligible. Such as Flobert rifles.

III

For here is the crux of the matter for us now. The partial freedom to mingle with his kind afforded by the removal of Angélique released an unnaturally inhibited passion for mixing with his own race and age. The inevitable sophistication of his two trips abroad, together with the consciousness of wealth that had been fairly forced upon him, substituted grandiose dreams for simple ambitions. Cousin Jim and Cousin Jim's Flobert rifle were stricken small.

Up to a certain age a child is a receptacle into which things can be poured. At that age he begins to react independently, utilizing and refashioning what he has received. A little later he must, for better or worse, take up his own life in his own way. Those who would make him must recognize this. In the first period they may supply; in the second they may guide; in the third they must stand aside. The trouble is many parents seek to supply—by authority—far into the third period.

The two closely succeeding trips abroad had closed the first period, and unfortunately even the small contribution Cousin Jim had been able to make had been cut off. Now he found that the old Saturday afternoons were no longer possible.

Naturally, nobody, not even Cousin Jim, analyzed all this. It seemed natural that the boy should turn to those of his own age. Cousin Jim was even hopeful that from that contact Zozo would gain what he needed. In any case, everybody was very busy. Including Cousin Jim. He was breaking a new bird dog. This, conceivably, might have interested Zozo, but as it didn't—

IV

Before dressing for dinner, Fred sought Zozo in the nursery. He had some sort of vague notion of keeping on terms with his son, and more than a vague sense of bafflement in the attempt. He supposed that was inevitable with small boys of this age. It had been so with himself. Nevertheless, he dimly visualized a father-and-son relation in which the two should be pals, should do things together.

Zozo was having his supper. Whenever not overawed Zozo was now inclined to be "fresh." This was merely the old sullenness in a new form.

"Hullo, son," Fred greeted him.

"'Llo," Zozo condescended.

"What you been up to to-day?"

"Playing with the kids."

"Seen Cousin Jim lately?"

"Naw."

"I thought he was going to teach you to shoot."

Zozo merely wriggled.

"When you get so you can hit the bull's eye I'll get you a little rifle of your own."

Zozo ate beefsteak.

"Wouldn't you like that?"

"Naw," said Zozo.

Fred was nonplussed. This was abnormal. He of course knew nothing of the great Motor-Car Dream. Awkwardly he tried to discover another topic of mutual interest. Lacking the key he failed. It was almost with a sense of relief—but of a very wistful relief—that he answered Middleton's respectful sugges-

tion that it was high time to dress for the Pines' dinner. He sighed. Small boys were always like that, he supposed.

Fred was beginning grudgingly to admit to himself that Middleton was at times a comfort. Especially at times like these when he was very tired.

CHAPTER XXXV

I

THE office was bad enough, but Fred had to keep up with Minnie. Surely any reasonable woman would have been justified in thinking that so complete an upheaval in life as the removal from the Hill would have settled it. Not at all! He had forgotten Southworth; or if he had remembered that talented person, he would never have thought of him as a baneful influence. He had also forgotten that a slogan is a powerful moving agent, and that Southworth had formulated a very catchy one. But Minnie had not forgotten. "Erect a monument to one's taste." Minnie moved fast.

On the following Sunday afternoon, then, she proposed to Fred that they should go driving together. He assented with alacrity. He loved to putter aimlessly along the countryside roads; an amusement that ordinarily appealed very little to Minnie's more lively tastes. They set out in the "phaeton" behind one of the team horses. It was a bright day in the early autumn, and the road trees and forests were a pattern of rich loveliness. The air was absolutely still, as though the season were in a suspension of waiting its call to vanish. All things were still with it, cast in a spell of yellow sun-bathed immobility and of silence. Only an occasional meadow-lark, fluttering from the fields to a fence post, uttered a liquid half-song, as though he had forgotten the imminent winter in his brave vision of the spring to come.

The horse, left more or less to his own devices, plodded slowly along. Fred lighted a cigar. Minnie opened her tiny face-sunshade.

"This is great!" observed Fred after a long interval of silence.

The peace and simplicity had relaxed his tensions. For the first time in a long while he felt natural, like himself.

They had taken, at Minnie's suggestion, the road out past Burton Lake. It was a typical country road of the time and place, slightly crowned but otherwise very little improved, bordered irregularly with old forest trees.

Burton Lake was distant about five miles. It shone through the hardwood fringe that bordered it bluer than the sky, and the rounded hills that rolled up and away from it were crowned with scattered elms and hickories. Minnie put her hand on the slackened reins and the drowsy horse came to a halt.

"Eh?" enquired Fred, coming to.

"Isn't it beautiful here!" said Minnie.

Fred looked about him. He agreed that it was beautiful, and volunteered the remark that you used to be able to get up quite a few partridges along the shore.

"It can be bought for fifty dollars an acre," Minnie informed him.

Fred chuckled.

"I haven't a doubt of it," he acknowledged, "but who'd want it?"

"I'd like it," said Minnie.

Fred roused himself to stare.

"What in blazes for?" he demanded.

"It's such a beautiful place."

"Well," said Fred with some reason, "you can look at it without owning it. The looking's free."

"Maybe; but I'd like to own it just the same. I'd like to feel it's mine."

"But there's no *sense* in buying wild land like that," urged Fred. "It isn't good for a thing. Why do you suppose it's wild land and for sale? Just because it's worthless."

"I've always wanted to own some land," observed Minnie.

"Haven't you got enough on hand?" pleaded Fred. "Amateur farming is the bunk. It's like pouring water down a rat-hole. For heaven's sake *why* have you got *this* bug, Minnie? It's plain foolishness!"

But she shook her head charmingly, biting her lower lip.

"I like to be foolish," she said. "Call it a whim. Don't you like me to have whims? Come, now; you wouldn't want me a serious, sensible old sobersides. Think of all the strings of pearls I might fancy. I'm really a very economical wife, you know. This is my string of pearls."

"But if you *must* go in for that sort of thing—and I warn you, you have no idea of the worry and trouble you are letting yourself in for—why in thunder don't you pick out something with some chance to it?"

"Oh, I've no intention of going in for farming, if that's what's bothering you."

"Well, I don't know what you expect to do with it, then," complained Fred.

Minnie did not reply to this.

"Let's hitch the horse and take a little walk over toward the Lake," she suggested.

For the first time Fred noted her costume, and a fleeting suspicion crossed his mind that this Sunday excursion was not as aimless as it had appeared. This suspicion was strengthened by the little walk. Minnie led the way confidently to various points.

"Look here," Fred accused her suddenly, "you've got this all figured out."

"But isn't it *lovely*?" she asked.

"Why, yes, it's pretty enough," admitted Fred, "but, great snakes, what can you *do* with it?"

"I told you. It's my string of pearls. And you must admit it's cheap."

"The only earthly value it's got is the wood on it. What can you *do* with it?"

"We might possibly want to live here some day," stated Minnie calmly.

Fred stopped short.

"Live here! Are you crazy? Why, we've just moved! And live out here in the country? Why, it's five miles! It's absurd: idiotic! Danged if I ever want to roost out here with the crows, five miles from the office and the club and all my friends! It would take a good hour to drive in. And in winter, by Jinks! or in the spring mud——"

"Now don't get excited," laughed Minnie, "we won't move out to-morrow. I said *some* day, and *perhaps*. If Mr. Southworth is right and in time people do live in the country, why this is the one really beautiful location around Little Falls."

"If he's right!" grumbled Fred sarcastically.

"Well," argued Minnie, "suppose he's wrong: what of it? Suppose I don't do anything at all with it? It's a moderately cheap pleasure, as things go. The whole two hundred acres——"

"Oh, so you know there's just two hundred acres!" interrupted Fred, still disgruntled and sarcastic.

"Of course. Well, the whole can be bought for ten thousand dollars. Think of that string of pearls!"

"That's a lot of money. You talk as if it were nothing. I seem to remember when ten thousand dollars would have looked like a pretty good year's income."

Minnie sighed patiently. Her correlations were prompter than Fred's. He had not yet accustomed himself to so much money coming in; nor to so much money going out. The two facts had not as yet fused.

"You do not mean to tell me that we cannot afford it."

Fred did not reply.

"Well, then! Let's acknowledge it's foolish, if you will have it that way. Still, I want it: I really do. It will give me great pleasure."

Fred had by now had time to orient himself, to bring reason to apply on the instinct of long habit. He chuckled good-humouredly.

"Then you shall have it," he gave in, "but, my dear, you're crazy in the head."

He had to endure considerable banter from his acquaintances when the news of the purchase became public. At the Iroquois Club the men pretended to give him valuable advice on how to make his new venture profitable. Atkins in particular took great pleasure in working out in detail a scheme for a frog farm, filling sheets of paper with statistics which he relishingly submitted to Fred before an appreciative audience. Fred laughed.

"You'll have to talk to Minnie," was all he said. "It's one of her fool notions. She likes the scenery."

To Little Falls the land around Burton Lake was minus-zero as property, especially since all the partridges had been shot out.

II

About Christmas time Minnie went on a trip to New York. She tried to get Fred to accompany her, but he most emphatically could see his way clear to doing nothing of the sort. He was too busy.

Fred's present trouble was that he had yet to learn in its perfection the art of delegation. Normally he should have progressed in growth in a plodding and methodical manner; and here he had been jumped ahead suddenly. He had not yet regained his balance. The job of just being a rich man was bigger than he had supposed. The daily accumulation of work appalled him.

Minnie was totally unable to understand how this could be, why so wealthy a man should not be happy and enjoy life.

"There's no sense in working so hard," she told him, a little impatiently. "People can be hired, surely."

Fred, just from a day filled with particularly nagging details, sighed. He could explain it, he supposed, but the task involved the repeating and rehashing from which he desired only to escape.

"It's business; you would not understand," he contented himself by saying.

This exasperated Minnie, and she showed it. They drew apart. Fred beat a retreat. Minnie was getting awfully touchy lately, very nervous. It was no wonder, really. She did a tremendous lot, busy from morning until night; and she did it mighty well. He was proud of her. It was lucky she was so competent. Fred, like most home-loving men, had heretofore always taken a very intimate interest in his household and all its details. He knew what repairs, additions, or alterations were necessary, and what artisans were going to do them, and how much they were going to charge. Such things, indeed, had always more or less waited on his decision. It had been hard to break that habit. Even yet it gave him a vague uneasiness to know that things of the sort were going on without his knowledge and approval. But it had to be; he simply had not time for it. Even the bills he had to order paid on Minnie's mere endorsement, without examination or discussion. Not that he doubted that endorsement; but it uneasily offended his business instincts not to know personally what he was paying for.

At the office, delegation was not so easy to him as yet. He had an instinct of mastery, a feeling that he must grapple the thing, subdue the thing, manage the thing himself, or go under. It was his instinctive, unreasoning challenge to something that threatened to be bigger than himself. To have left old Mr. Kirby's machinery functioning as it was, to have been content to sit back in receipt of the income, would have been impossible to him, for it would have meant a capitulation to forces against which, unknowing, he had been struggling for years. The soul has its antagonists, unsuspected as such, against which it must measure its strength or perish of fatty degeneration.

Heretofore he had exerted his powers against simple understandable things. Now all at once the world had become complicated. The sudden and unexpected expansion, combined with the complete alteration of his relations with his fellow business men, was not only a puzzle but a disillusion. He had put in the

best years of his life working toward a certain thing—the power of money. He confidently expected to win it—in due time. And here all at once he had it! Surely he should have been satisfied. He was incapable of realizing that his love of power was in reality based on his satisfaction in having produced or developed it himself.

It was a very trying time, a very exhausting time. He was essentially a fighting man, and now he was bereft of his strength. That was what made him feel so tired. They had taken away from him the things he could do well, and substituted something for which he was not at all fitted. There could be for him none of Minnie's elation; just a horrid oppression without understanding of it. Life had never so pressed him back against the wall before or imposed on him even the fleeting shadow of a cowardly impulse; but now night and morning he fought the nightmare of his waiting office. For the first time in his life he was irritable, did not sleep well, complained of the food. Even his usual gregarious desire for his friends diminished. Somehow they bothered and worried him with their talk and bantering and their well-meant suggestions as to what he should do.

He supposed vaguely that it would come out all right, that in due time he would take charge. It was a postponed thing, like his relations with Zozo.

III

So Minnie went on to New York alone. Her main and ostensible object was Christmas shopping, but she had several side lines in view. She returned home with enough gifts and dinner favours and things for the house plausibly to account for the visit, but the real points thereof did not ripen until one sunny day in the glad springtime.

CHAPTER XXXVI

I

ON THAT bright morning the accommodation train pulling into Little Falls shunted a freight car to the siding next Spring Street. Before it drew out, it also deposited from its single passenger car a very foreign-looking gentleman of distinguished appearance. He was a brilliant and dashing, hawk-nosed, bright-eyed, waxed-moustached creature. Strangely enough he was caparisoned cap-à-pie with an almost mediæval equipment of offensive and defensive leather armour. Not to prolong the suspense, Minnie had bought a car, and this was its French chauffeur.

For be it known, this was the first "horseless carriage" brought to Little Falls, and it would have been quite useless without its mahout. Also the convention of those primitive days would have decreed that the mahout would have been devoid of magic without the leather armour. The whole thing belonged together, though separable. Either component was innocuous, even impotent, alone.

To our eyes also the vehicle would have looked a wonderful contraption. It stood high off the ground, it was entered from the back like an omnibus, its steering wheel was so nearly vertical that it resembled the brakewheel on a freight car, it was entirely innocent of top or windshield, it was cranked from the side; it proved to harbour a growling, grinding, spitting wild creature directly underneath its forward seat, it ended abruptly at the "dash board" in front, it left dark sullen pools of oil wherever it had stood for two consecutive minutes.

Questions by hundreds were showered on the Frenchman to which no replies were vouchsafed. Perhaps he did not understand: it is possible that ants and worms are constantly asking questions of you and me, and we unaware. He poured gasoline from a can into a receptacle under the seat. With mysterious French oaths and a crooked crank he repeatedly performed an

apparent laparotomy in the side of the monster. At the long last he was rewarded by a series of sudden and obstreperous explosions, dense clouds of smoke, and a violent shivering of the whole fabric. Instantly he leaped to the seat and began feverishly to agitate levers, small pumps, and push buttons. Evidently he had not been quick enough, for the hidden monster spit twice in a spiteful manner and retired from life. The second attempt, however, was more successful. By sufficient agility the Frenchman was able to soothe it to a menacing but steady grumble. There was a grinding clash, two or three jerks forward, and the chariot moved, actually moved! Dust rose from beneath its astonishing wheels. Spiteful barks voiced its triumphant vitality. A wonderful blue stink trailed behind it.

The crowd stared after it open-mouthed, and a great psychic wave of awe and admiration and worship pursued and enveloped that Frenchman. In all that great cityful it surely was pitiful that only this one man was able to accomplish these things, for such a pitch of haughty superciliousness as he thereby attained is unbecoming to man's estate.

People stopped and stared, their mouths open; people ran to porches and windows, took a hasty look and dashed back to get others; dogs fell in behind, barking furiously in the glorious impression that they were valiantly driving the pesky thing out of the country; horses gave terrified snorts and teetered their hind-quarters up and down, or made attempts to turn completely around inside of the cramping radius of the vehicles to which they were attached, or tried earnestly to go away from there. Men clung to bits and said "soho boy, soho" and "damn that thing" in the same breath, which was confusing; men plied whip vigorously to preserve established orientation; men saved forcibly on first one rein then the other in an attempt to divert their horses' single-track minds from the idea of sudden departure. Only the fact that the incredible rate of speed carried the thing by before the shock of surprise had passed saved the day. It proceeded steadily on its way, uttering from time to time hoarse honkings. There were no speedometers in those days, but the cooler bystanders estimated the speed as at least ten or twelve miles an hour.

Leaving this trail of wonder, excitement, and a growing feeling of outrage behind it, the car blazed its way to the huge gates at the entrance to the Kirby grounds and disappeared.

II

In our days of almost universal motor transport it is a little difficult to realize the stir and discussion the first of these vehicles caused to the Horse Age. "A hoss," said a cowboy to me, "is a plumb narrow-minded critter." He is therefore in the position of an ultra-conservative with considerable public spirit, willing to do his service in the world, but quick to resent innovation and jealous of prerogative. Only after a long progressive struggle was he brought to admit that any vehicle whatever should be allowed to move without one of his own or an allied species attached to its forward end; and then only by undeviating routes and on rails laid for the purpose. This concession was considered liberal and was made only after a long and bitter Trolley-Car Revolution. Even yet irreconcilables from rural constituencies were inclined to sporadic outbreaks; while some few of the old-line city animals still said it with snorts. This thing did not play fair. It did not stick to the rails. It swooped about like a horse and buggy, only without the horse. It made noises too that were unlike milk cans or loose wheels or insecure windows or any other legitimate rattles. And to it clung an element of terror. It might be a horse-eating contraption.

In the Great Trolley-Car Revolution the horses had stood alone. Man was unanimously against them. But in this new Revolution they obtained considerable backing from the human species. If Minnie wanted to create a sensation, she certainly succeeded. She left a trail of helpless resentment behind her whenever she went abroad. It was a menace to go through the streets at any such rate of speed. There were laws against "scorchers" on bicycles, and there ought to be laws against this sort of thing. Somebody'd get run over first thing she knew; or somebody'd get killed in a runaway—or something! People wrote to the *News* about it. The *News* even had a sarcastic editorial on the subject; but Fred saw the editor and that was not repeated. Fred more than half-sympathized with the public feeling, but he was not going to see his wife's name in the papers. A half-movement was started to introduce an ordinance prohibiting any but horse-drawn vehicles, at least in the business district.

Nothing came of it. Public sentiment was far from unanimous. Some perceived vaguely the dawn of the new era; others liked to argue about "rights."

The bills in payment for the thing did not bother Fred nearly so much as the thing itself. He was gradually accustoming himself to the disbursement of larger and larger sums. But he did dislike being conspicuous, and he did dislike running counter to prevailing easy-going public opinion. Personally he got enough of opposition and fighting in the conduct of business. At first he refused to ride in the contraption, but of course ended by taking a chance. Then he too bought an equipment.

For in those days nobody dreamed of stepping into a motor car without an equipment. The minimum consisted of a cap, preferably of leather, somewhat on the pattern of a yachting cap; a pair of goggles with sideshields entirely to enclose the eye sockets; a real leather coat; and a pair of leather gauntlets with six-inch cuffs. All these paraphernalia were supposed to be made necessary because of the rush of wind induced by the tremendous speed, which, on a fair and open roadway, sometimes climbed to thirty miles an hour. When the party of four or five descended for refreshment at a corner grocery as much as twenty-five or thirty miles in the country, they resembled both in appearance and in the bundled hampered clumsiness of their movements a **cross** between divers and mediæval warriors. But the rig-out gave a tremendous distinction! A practical addition would have been a telescoping resilient backbone, had such an extra been possible. The roads were terrible.

III

The radius of life was immensely extended. One of Minnie's first excursions was to Burton Lake. She reported to Fred that they had made the five miles in twenty minutes.

"You see!" she cried triumphantly, "that isn't much longer than it takes you to walk down to the office now! And if the road wasn't so rough we could make it in fifteen minutes, easily."

"Maybe," cautioned Fred, "but I'd go a little easy on this speed stuff. And I'd like to see how long it would take you after a rain—or in the snow."

Minnie subsided at this. She could not but admit to herself that weather conditions had been ideal for this record-breaking dash. And there was another consideration that was not mentioned between them simply because by now both were infected by

that strange disease of blind partisanship that seizes a man possessed by a new car. The consideration was jeeringly expressed by the inevitable bystanders of immature years in what became a standardized phrase.

"Get a horse! Get a horse!" they yelled.

And Etienne, the chauffeur who looked like a duke (at least), descended from his lofty eminence, removed his heavy jousting armour, donned a light hauberk of blue jeans, and disappeared beneath the car, all except his feet. Minnie and her companions sat bolt upright and stared off into space, and had excellent practice in simulating complete detachment from their immediate surroundings. In justice both to Etienne and the Car it must be recorded that sooner or later returned life followed his mysterious communings with the monster. But sometimes before the latter acknowledged its error an hour had dragged by, and it had been necessary to remove many cogs, wheels, and pins from the monster's precious store before it cried "enough" and capitulated. And once or twice the ribald advice had justified itself. Etienne crawling from beneath confronted his mistress with raised shoulders, lifted eyebrows, and outspread hands of mortified apology. In rapid French he offered technical explanation that completely exonerated his beloved. Minnie did not understand it, but she knew the practical sequence. The horse was got; and slowly the little procession returned to town accompanied by an increasing nimbus of delighted small boys. Then, generally, for some days Etienne and a blacksmith in his confidence laboured in secret.

The change of tires was another prolific source of inexactness in the meeting of even tentative schedules. The tires of those days were temperamental creatures that collapsed or blew up with loud reports if one but spoke crossly to them. In addition the streets and roads seemed to have been constructed with a top surfacing of sharp rocks, broken glass, and bent nails. The tires dwelt in a deep groove into which they had settled down with every thought of permanence, and from which they had to be pried by main strength inch by inch. It was a merry life, but accuracy in meeting appointments was not within the scope of its contemplation. When Minnie really had to make a specified place at or reasonably near, a specified hour, without fail or excuse, she ordered out the team. Indeed a *mot* of Fred's went the rounds, an unexpected spark of wit struck from him by bitter experience

"What do you think of this automobile business?" Pine asked him at the club. "Do you like yours?"

Pine, as well as Atkins and one or two others of the Little Falls wealthy, were considering.

"Well, I don't know," Fred had replied. "A car gets there quicker, but a horse oftener."

CHAPTER XXXVII

I

THE other result of Minnie's Christmas visit disclosed itself more gradually. It crept into Fred's consciousness like the dawn in high latitudes, whereas the car had come up like thunder.

Minnie spent a great deal of time at Burton Lake. She bumped and bounced out there almost every afternoon, sometimes alone, sometimes in company. As far as she could manage it she made her arrangements early in the day in order to leave the time free for this purpose. Fred had to admit to himself that the purchases of the land and of the car had justified themselves; for the former seemed to be giving Minnie much relaxation and exercise, and the latter made possible the frequent excursions. Though how she could sustain an interest in tramping around and around the same old place, looking at the same old views, he could not understand. He was soon enlightened.

In Minnie's dressing room were piles of books into which she dipped from moment to moment, in snatches, between engagements. They dealt with landscaping, and architectural periods and gardening and artistic composition. One evening Fred found, on returning from the office, that he had a guest in the house who turned out to be the author of one of these books. His name was Moody. He was a pleasant sort of a fellow, not at all super-intellectual, but he and Minnie talked stuff that put Fred to sleep, though he tried to show intelligent interest when they appealed to him, as they often did. Moody had great facility with a sketching pencil. As Fred could just barely draw a straight line with a ruler, this knack stirred his respect. Moody and Minnie argued with considerable animation, Fred gathered, on such things as whether the hickory tree on the crest of one of the Burton Lake hillocks did or did not ruin or help the composition; and to aid his contention Moody filled sheet after sheet

with the most delightful little landscapes, showing the tree here, or fifty feet away.

"I don't know anything about it. Looks all right to me. What difference does it make anyway? The tree's there. You could cut it out, of course," he added. "Hickory makes good fireplace wood."

Minnie spent many hours at the Lake with her guest, who prolonged his visit in a puzzling fashion. One evening, prowling about looking for something, Fred pushed open a door in the third story of the Mansion. The place had been a trunk room the last time he had seen it. Now, to his surprise, he found that the trunks had all been moved out, and that their place had been taken by a drawing table. Fred looked curiously at the paper thumb-tacked on it. It seemed to be a sketch map of Burton Lake on a scale so large that each individual tree and bush was designated. The work was obviously not of surveyor-accuracy, but was beautifully done. While he was examining it with admiration, Moody pushed open the door and entered.

"This yours?" Fred enquired.

Moody laughed, a little deprecatingly.

"Such as it is. It is only a rough idea. It is not accurate."

"It looks to me like a good job," returned Fred.

"Intended to formulate the ideas Mrs. Kirby and I have worked out, that's all. It's our notion of how things should be if they weren't as they are."

"Like golf," supplied Fred.

Moody laughed.

"Exactly. Of course actual work would require a survey and a professional draughtsman."

"Actual work?" repeated Fred.

"Assisting nature to look her prettiest."

Even then Fred did not quite gather what it was all about. His edification was completed by Minnie that very evening.

"Don't you think," said she, "that it would be real economy to put on several crews of surveyors and get the thing done quickly? It would save on Mr. Moody's time."

This was like talking Sanskrit to Fred. He had to have an exasperatingly detailed explanation in elementary and monosyllabic English. To his astonishment he found that Moody was not present merely as a house guest or friend; but that the pleasure of his company was being paid for.

"Really, Fred," said Minnie impatiently, "you are sometimes too stupid! What in the world did you suppose he was doing all that work for?"

"I thought he liked it," murmured Fred.

So these dozens of sketches were serious! The question of that hickory tree was not academic!

"But we must have an accurate contour map before we can be certain, and by employing several surveyors we would get it done more quickly and be able to come to a final decision while Mr. Moody is here."

"How much does Mr. Moody drag down a day?" asked Fred.

"You talk of it as though he were a day labourer," objected Minnie. "He will charge us a fee, of course; like any professional man. Naturally, the amount will depend more or less on the time he gives us. And, anyway, I can't see where it makes any difference whether we have to pay one surveyor for a lot of days or several surveyors for fewer days."

"Neither do I," confessed Fred. "But why do you ask me? You and Moody seem to have this all fixed up."

Minnie's eyes filled with tears.

"I thought you'd be interested."

"I am; I am!" cried Fred. "I was just joking. Get your surveyors—or do you want me to enquire? Suppose we go out Sunday and you can show me what you think of doing!"

"If we ever *do* go out there to live," she began. Fred snorted. "Well, it's not impossible. If we ever *do* go out there to live, we might as well have a plan ready—at least. Mr. Moody is not always available: we are very lucky to get so much of him. We have to take him when we can get him. I just want to get plans ready in case—and it interests me very much."

"That's the main point," conceded Fred. He did not much care. It was Minnie's toy; a little expensive, perhaps, but certainly she deserved what she wanted, and it took her out in the open air. If she wanted to move a tree or so about, why let her go to it! This was Fred's Age of Innocence: the first bills had not yet come in.

II

Ages of Innocence never last very long. Four gangs of surveyors, a professional draughtsman, and Moody worked overtime in the interest of speed. Blue prints appeared in rolls, with

contours and cross-sections and shaded areas representing cuts and fills. Moody departed. Apparently all was over.

But nobody ever made elaborate plans without generating a desire to express those plans in action. Minnie had at first, in all honesty, intended to stop at blue prints, which would be laid away until that remotely future date—probably when Zozo should be grown up and about to marry—when they should finally think about a new house. But Moody had not been gone two days before there was a team of horses and a scraper on the job. Just one team, one scraper. Minnie explained to Fred that she had found out through the charity organization that this man had fallen upon evil days and his scraper was getting rusty. After she had roosted on a hillock all one afternoon watching, and had realized just how little impression one scraper makes on the eternal hills, she made her personal presence worth while by the addition of more teams and scrapers. That, at least, occupied her attention. Then she found that unless she was there all the time they were sure to do things wrong. As, obviously, she could not be there all the time, she employed a foreman. The foreman had to be an intelligent man; in fact, he had to have more or less engineering knowledge to enable him to follow the blue prints. It was poor economy to waste him and his salary merely on a little earth moving. As long as he was there anyway, it might be well to get a little more done. Axemen and tree-movers appeared.

The site was virgin land of hill and dale and swamp. Soon, by natural accretion, the place swarmed with horses and men, scraping, levelling, moving hills from one place to another, making terraces, excavating holes which later would be filled with water. Axemen cut out many trees. Other trees were moved to slightly different places. As the work broadened, Minnie became more and more fascinated. It was wonderful, this dealing with materials in the large; like continent making; real creative work, fashioning to one's dream the face of the earth.

Costs mounted. Fred was again aroused, only to be again routed by the sheer cold logic of figures. They could afford it: his brain could not deny that. But it did seem to him a ridiculously expensive toy. And to what end? There was no question of building a house, of living away out there in the country. This was just preliminary to something in a merely possible and certainly remote future; and a fortune was being poured in. He lapsed into a sort of guilty, subconscious, unexpressed hope that

they would go bankrupt soon so he could be comfortable again. Only he knew the hope was vain: they would not go broke.

III

Nevertheless, this activity of Minnie's gave Fred indirectly his own first private glimmer in the grayness of his new days. Fred had not gained much but hard work and a moderately depressed mind out of all this. Minnie had been doing all the soaring. He had been struggling merely to come to the surface, to catch up with what he considered the essential duties of his situation. It had consumed all his time, and more than his income of energy.

But now he touched momentarily one of the prerogatives.

It was on account of the road. He had returned with Minnie in the car from one of his infrequent visits to the Burton Lake place; and, as usual, they had bounced and jounced out of one chuck hole into another until an ominous *snap* revealed a broken spring. To complete his aggravation he was very anxious to get back to town.

"It isn't the car, it's these atrocious roads," Minnie answered his customary outburst against the vehicle. "It's an outrage that they should be allowed to get into such condition. Look at the Wellsby Turnpike."

Minnie ignored the fact that the road past the Burton Lake place led to nowhere important, tapped no productive country, and carried so small a traffic that the grass was worn out only in a single track where the wheels ran and the horses trod, while the Wellsby Turnpike was the main artery of a prosperous farming country. These considerations might ordinarily have signified to Fred's more judicial mind, but now that broken spring and the lost engagement obscured the wider horizons. When finally Etienne had bound the frame to the axle direct, with the intervention of a block of wood, and had announced himself as ready to go on, Fred cancelled his first orders.

"You need not take me to the office," he commanded. "Take me to Larry's place. Drive down Madison Street."

"What in the world are you going to that horrible saloon for?" enquired Minnie, horrified.

"I'm going to see about this road," replied Fred grimly.

Still seething with the sluggishly ebullient anger peculiar to his

slowly aroused but tenacious nature, Fred left the equipage on Madison Street—at Minnie's insistence that she wasn't going to stop in front of a low saloon—and walked to Larry's place. Fred was not an habitu  , but he was very well known by sight to the proprietor.

"Where's Sam Brady?" demanded Fred curtly.

"He isn't here just now. I don't rightly know where he is, Mr. Kirby; have you tried his office?" replied Larry.

"Well, I want to see him," returned Fred, "and I want to see him now. I haven't much time."

Larry looked at him reflectively.

"If you want to wait five minutes, I think he may be in," he said at last.

"I'll wait—five minutes," growled Fred, looking at his watch.

Larry called an assistant from the back, took off his white apron, slipped on a coat and hat, and went out. He did not seek far. Indeed, he merely went down a narrow alleyway next his own saloon, mounted a steep outside stairway, and knocked at the only door to which it led. After a moment's pause the door swung open. He entered a small room with a desk, four plain chairs, as many fancy spittoons, and a practicable lounge. This was Sam Brady's unofficial headquarters where he might retire either for repose or conference without the risk of disturbance. Few knew of its existence and that few were most thoroughly aware that attempt to enter except by the intermediacy of Larry would be both futile and resented.

"Kirby's below; he wants to see you," said Larry.

"Know what he's after?" asked Brady.

"He didn't let on. But he's got a mad on."

"Fighting?"

Larry shook his head.

"No. Just plain set about something."

Brady arose from the couch where he had been lying, put on his coat, and followed Larry back to the saloon.

"How are you, Mr. Kirby," he greeted Fred in his clipped fashion. "Want to see me, I understand. Let's just step into the back room."

They did so, and after dismissing Larry with an order for two lemon and seltzers, they faced each other.

"Something you want?" Brady prompted him.

"See here, Brady, that Burton Lake road is a disgrace. There

hasn't been a lick of work done on it for years. It's got to be fixed."

Brady eyed him speculatively.

"What have I got to do with it?" he enquired at length.

Fred snorted. "Look here, I'm too busy for nonsense. Talk straight: I'm no fool."

"Neither am I, Mr. Kirby," returned Sam quietly. "You must know that I have no official position under the county, and that this is a matter for the supervisors."

Fred brushed this aside.

"Well, I want you to see that the supervisors get busy," he growled.

Sam laughed.

"If you care to retain me I shall be glad to present the matter to them."

"I don't care how you work it. But I want a decent road."

Sam considered.

"It will not be too easy," he submitted. "The road fund is low and the farmers out south are hollering for macadam. They do a good deal of hauling and feel they are entitled to it."

"Well, I pay a good many taxes," countered Fred bluntly, "for which I get nothing, as near as I can make out, and I feel I am entitled to something myself."

"That's all right," agreed Sam; "but I'm telling you that there'll be opposition."

"That's all right. You fix it."

"I'll let you know the chances in a few days," agreed Sam.

They parted on this understanding. After a mysterious interval the supervisors voted to improve the Burton Lake road. A storm of protest broke, but without effect. Everybody knew that had it not been for the Kirbys' suburban property no such improvement would have been undertaken. The morning newspaper had considerable to say about opening up a new section to deserved prosperity, but the argument was pretty feeble. The afternoon paper, which was the sensational sheet, shrieked aloud of bribery and corruption and especial privilege. It was indeed a good example of the latter, but the former did not enter into the transaction, though nobody would have believed it. Even Sam's attorney bill for "services" was so moderate as to preclude the idea that anybody had made anything illegal: there was not enough to pass along. But he was satisfied. He played a long-

sighted game. A little adverse public opinion—which, as always, soon wore out—was a small price to pay for the future “friendliness” of the Kirby millions.

At the Iroquois Club some of Fred’s intimate friends joked him a little about his “private driveway.” Nobody blamed him for using his power to get what he wanted. What was power for? Wish we had a “pull” too!

CHAPTER XXXVIII

FRED'S new ability to "fix things"—as an accompaniment or prerogative of wealth—soon had scope to exercise itself in another direction. It had to do with the car.

As might be imagined, there were two members of the Kirby family who took to it from the very start, like filings to a magnet. These were Zozo and Bunk-the-dog, and both were so hopelessly infatuated that neither persuasion, threat, nor punishment had the slightest effect. Whenever one's eye was off them for an instant they sped, straight as arrow's flight, to the stable, where Bunk-the-dog took his place on the front seat, and Zozo attached himself in an interrogative capacity to the activities of Etienne. The car had a tremendous lot of brass about it which must be kept glittering, and when nothing else was doing Zozo would rub this reverently with a bit of waste. But whenever Etienne pulled on the overalls, then Zozo drew close, watching eagerly every detail of the mysterious tinkering. He got oil on his clothes; his fingernails were a sight. His interest and intelligence appealed to Etienne, who connived with him against the feminine hierarchy that attempted to control his destinies. For a week or so a bitter and savage warfare was waged between the opposing factions; until Angélique, who was theoretically still in charge of Zozo, driven to desperation, at last fulfilled her threat of reporting to Madame.

She reported at great length and volubly, bringing forward for consideration all aspects and angles of the question from grease spots to truancy; from disobedience to association with *canaille* like Etienne; and she cried upon high heaven to witness that she had done her durndest and angels could do no more!

Minnie took a hand in the war. She forbade Zozo to go near the car; she forbade Etienne to allow Zozo to go near the car. That ought to settle it. It settled nothing. When did mere prohibition ever settle anything when opposed to a genuine passion? Etienne, accused of perfidy, remained calm. He knew

nothing of grease spots. Etienne's passion, too, was machinery, and he had nothing but contempt for feminine meddling in man's affairs. He was quite willing to be a conspirator and to lie in concert with Zozo for so good a cause.

"Monsieur Zozo," he confided to Jean, who was his discreet familiar, "has the true feeling for the car. He already understands the working of it better than that *sot* of a smith."

When haled before Fred, after the whole situation had been dumped on him in spite of his protests, Etienne boldly took the same attitude.

Fred tried to talk to Zozo. The latter had by habit retired into his egg-shaped aura. Fred's kindly meant questions elicited only the grudging information that he just wanted to have a little fun and that Angélique was always fussing. He was obstinately silent when the subject of plain obedience was brought forward.

Of all things under heaven Fred hated to be dragged in for domestic decisions, but when reluctantly he undertook such an affair he went into it with characteristic painstaking thoroughness and he displayed an unexpected commonsense and firmness in dealing with it.

"The thing interests the boy," he told Minnie at last, "and as near as I can make out he's learning something. I can't see where it does him any harm."

"But I don't like his associating with servants so much," objected Minnie.

"I can't see much difference between his associating with Angélique or Etienne," said Fred. "Give him a pair of overalls and let him mess around a certain amount. I'll fix Etienne."

So it was arranged, to Zozo's vast astonishment and relief. It seemed incredible that so fascinating a pleasure should become legitimate. Since fulfilment of other duties was antecedent, those duties were fulfilled as never before; indeed, their prompt occasion was clamorously demanded.

Bunk-the-dog won a similar victory. His passion to ride carried him over all obstacles. It was not considered desirable that he ride always, but that had nothing to do with it. Wherever he happened to be, he caught the first explosion of the motor and came tearing to climb breathlessly in the seat by the driver. Nothing short of brutality could then eject him. It is always that way with dogs. Some people struggle, others buy seat covers.

CHAPTER XXXIX

I

ZOZO'S mechanical bent was undoubted. With the official sanction that came with the overalls he learned rapidly; so that soon, under the tutelage of the increasingly gratified Etienne, he was familiar with the care of the car and the principles of its operation. It was a short and natural transition to the actual running of the contraption.

At first this venture was made in secret. Both the conspirators had more than a suspicion that the idea would be quashed at its inception. They hoped that the finished product might be accepted.

Zozo's short legs could not reach the pedals. Etienne built him out to the edge of the seat by means of cushions. They practised cautiously on side streets. Zozo learned with all the speed of a boy of twelve whose interest is caught. Then one day in the open country they demonstrated to Minnie. At first she was horrified and refused to permit it. That so small a creature should successfully conduct so formidable a piece of mechanism seemed incredible, impossible. But Etienne assured her earnestly that it was entirely safe; that Monsieur Zozo was already a *chauffeur expert*. The phenomenon of the haughty Etienne being earnest about anything tipped Minnie's decision. Zozo took the driver's seat and Minnie the edge of hers.

Not only did Zozo conduct the machine, but he conducted it well. He had the instinctive eye of the born driver for distance and momentum. With some people one feels nervous at fifteen miles an hour; with others one is completely at ease at forty. Zozo belonged to the forty class. Not that the Kirby car could ever have made forty without imminent risk of disintegration.

From horrified skepticism Minnie passed all the way to unreasoning and partisan admiration. She bragged everywhere of Zozo's prowess.

"I feel as confident with him as I do with Etienne," she told

everybody. "I will take you out some afternoon and let you see for yourself. He is marvellous!"

She had very few takers for her invitations. Even those who carried heavy insurance preferred to observe from the side lines.

But outside the immediate circle of the Kirby acquaintance public indignation flamed high.

"You might as well give a child a stick of dynamite," declared Veritas. "Are the public streets to be the playground for infants with infernal machines?" queried Pro Bono Publico. The outcry was given point by the fact that Zozo one day killed a chicken. The accident was entirely ascribable to the yet uneradicated passion of chickens to cross the road, and not at all to lack of vigilance or care on the part of Zozo. Indeed, it was only chance that Zozo was at the wheel rather than Etienne. But that chicken became a symbol of the possible Slaughter of the Innocents. The chicken, according to indignant gossip, might have been a toddling child, it might have been an aged grandfather.

"What utter nonsense!" cried Minnie vigorously to the caller who had, purely as a friendly turn, brought her some of this gossip. "I was there and I saw it. It was not Zozo's fault in the slightest. The idiotic chicken just *dashed* out of the grass right in front of the car!"

"Of course, my dear. I know that. I'm just telling you what they *say*. I thought you ought to know."

"Well, all *I've* got to say," rejoined Minnie with heat, "is that if the toddling child and the aged grandfather acted the way that chicken did, they'd *deserve* to be run over!"

It therefore gradually became known that Minnie rather favoured judicious slaughter of infants and grandparents provided Zozo was amused thereat.

The owner of the chicken at first merely swore once or twice with vexation and was about to forget it, as he had forgotten one or two similar accidents due to dogs or horses in the past. But he found himself somewhat of a public character and the recipient of much advice. Finally he repaired to Fred's office. How he ever penetrated to a personal interview with that busy man was the subject of later investigation, but he did. Fred, amazed that so trivial a matter as a chicken should take his time, at first did not see the point at all.

"Killed a chicken, eh?" he responded to the first tremblingly restrained statement of the case. He stretched out his thick leg

and reached into his pants pocket. "All right: I'll take your word for it. How much is it?"

But it appeared that the price of the chicken was not in question. Fred listened in amazement to a confused rehash of back fence confabulations.

"Look here, Worden," he broke in good-humouredly at last, "you're making an awful lot out of nothing. From the way you talk you'd think that was the only chicken that had ever been killed on a street. Good Lord, man, it happens every day. I'm sorry; and I've offered to pay the damage. What is it you want, anyway?"

"I want to say that I think you have no right to allow that boy of yours to rampage around the streets. He's a menace to life and limb. You have no right, I tell you——"

Fred cut him short.

"If you want to bring up the question of rights, please remember that you allow chickens or any other live stock to wander at large at your own risk. I've considered this matter already, and I can tell you that my son is quite competent to drive that car under supervision better than I could myself. If you want to tackle anything of that sort I'd advise you to look after your own delivery boys. *They* are a menace on the public streets, if you like."

Worden began a heated reply.

"I'm busy," said Fred curtly. "I've offered to pay you for your confounded chicken. I haven't time to listen to anything more." He arose. "Good day," he concluded firmly.

Fred had paid only an amused attention to the whole teapot tempest heretofore. Now he was aroused. No one would have been quicker to curb any tendency to recklessness, but he had spent rather more time than he could afford investigating Zozo's competence. He had even gone somewhat into the actual working of the car, taking lessons from Etienne in its management, so he could determine for himself just how complicated or difficult that management might be. It proved to be absurdly simple.

"Well, youngster," he had delivered his final decision, "I can't see any reason why you should not drive it, if you want to, and if you obey orders. You must never go without Etienne, and you must never run over ten miles an hour."

He explained himself to Minnie after the elated Zozo had sped forth to tell the glad tidings to Etienne.

"It's like a gun," said he. "The only way to learn to handle a gun is to shoot; but of course no one would turn a small boy loose with a gun without an older person."

Two or three days later he learned something was afoot that had to do with the Chief of Police, and something else was projected as to a new ordinance of some sort. He was exasperated. The whole thing was silly. He reached for the telephone and called up in turn the Chief of Police and the alderman from his own ward. Nothing more was done. Again the mere threat of the Kirby Millions had had its effect. Zozo continued to drive the car. Use deadened the fire of public disapproval, though it still smouldered. Shortly the purchase of other cars scattered the embers.

II

All this was very unimportant, except as it indicates what was happening to Fred. Without knowing it he was gradually acquiring the habit of settling things autocratically. Though this had all the appearance of what we call the arrogance of wealth, and was so interpreted, it was not that at all. He was, as a matter of fact, so deeply immersed in his work, his time was so crowded, his duties so closely packed into the hours at his command, that extraneous matters always came to him as upsetting irregularities that must be got rid of as expeditiously as possible. So he settled such matters brusquely, in order to get back to what he considered important. He had no time to argue or explain. He issued decisions or orders. People did not like that, but they were helpless. They thought bitterly that Fred was overriding them because of the power of his wealth; and they resented it the more because they must accept the situation.

CHAPTER XL

I

THE summer had passed, and once more autumn had hazed over the clear outlines of the year. But at Burton Lake prodigies had been performed. The road was completed. Such speed in public works had never been known before. Minnie had haled Fred forth from his office to accompany her this time on her annual tour to New York. She said, quite justly, that he needed a vacation. Fred had protested but had gone, and he was enjoying himself. At the hotel he had run into Southworth, the architect they had met at Avignon, the author of Minnie's slogan. They were very glad to see each other. When they parted Fred insisted that he should dine with them that evening. Southworth discovered that his seed, planted on spec, had taken firm root, and that Minnie had already ideas on Italian palaces. So well did he manage that, when they left, it was arranged that he should follow them to Little Falls for a visit. Before the date of his arrival Minnie had just time to make her arrangements and to instruct Little Falls as to the distinguished quality of the visitor. A number of copies of Southworth's book on "The Evolution of the Architectural Influence" appeared in Porter's windows. The *News* carried a biographical sketch. Both these phenomena were details illustrative of Minnie's thorough executive genius. Porter would never have purchased with gainful intent the expensive volumes; nor did the "morgue" at the *News* office cover distant though distinguished architects. Minnie supplied both. The time was short, but Southworth's arrival was into a sufficiently warmed atmosphere.

II

He proved to be a shining success socially. There were dinners every evening, and invitations for lunches and teas. Southworth privately begged off from the latter.

"I will do anything you say, dear lady," he told Minnie. "But my time is so short. It seems a pity to spend it indoors with

people, no matter how delightful. The country is so glorious just now."

Minnie wanted nothing better. So, except for one club luncheon for men which Fred's convention of hospitality made necessary, the days were spent at Burton Lake. The last of Indian summer was lingering in smoke-hazed reluctance. Nothing pleasanter could be imagined than tramping about from one view point to another, wrangling good-humouredly, hammering out together an Idea, which slowly became visualized, first as a possibility, then as an immanent necessity of creation.

Southworth was a satisfactory person to wrangle with, for he was one of those who can discuss endlessly and without fatigue the smallest details, and at the same time he knew how to sink his personality in that of his disputant. That was part of his job. Apparently his whole interest was centred in helping Minnie erect that monument to her taste. But in the end he managed to infuse his ideas. He possessed an unfair advantage in his skill with a pencil. Give him but a few moments' time and he would turn out elevation sketches that no one could resist. It is said that in the architectural competition for the building of the Pyramids the winner nosed out his competitor because on his elevation sketch he drew not only the Pyramids, but a number of palm trees, a lady driving a chariot, and a child rolling a hoop. Minnie's first idea of an English house faded. The Italian palace won out.

III

Indeed it won out so decisively that it completely filled the field, not only of architecture but of life. Minnie's eyes were unsealed. She not only had to have that Italian palace, but she had to have it now, and Southworth must be the man to give it to her. She was like a child in that she could not bear even to contemplate the possibility that this should not come to pass. The necessity, long gathering, overflowed its dikes and flooded her being suddenly, almost without warning, late at night after all the household had retired. Hardly could she wait until morning. Southworth had said he was at present disengaged—at least, he was disengaged a week ago. But Fred must be handled. This was too big a project to undertake without his full knowledge and approval. In spite of the lateness of the hour she slipped on a negligee and made her way to his room.

Awakened from a sound sleep Fred required quite a bit of work to get him shoved off the bank and into the current, but once there he went downstream with surprisingly little struggle. He was more nearly prepared in mind than Minnie had believed possible. There were several reasons.

In the first place he was just beginning definitely to think of himself as a rich man, and the first thing a rich man thinks of when he acquires wealth is to build a palace. Why this should be so, I do not know. Very few people really like palaces as places of residence. But they all build them, much larger than they want, much more consistently in period than they want, and their spirits shiver through them. No one knows why rich people do these things. Obscurely it is felt to be befitting their station; a curious primal instinct.

This consideration, together with the interest induced in spite of himself by the detailed planning, had its influence with Fred; but the real factor was Zozo. Fred had before his eyes the vision of successive generations inhabiting the family homestead which he should build. It is a curious, old, outworn idea inherited from conditions that are past and gone; true enough of days when any individual's world was small. Then son followed father, generation after generation, in the same occupation carried forward in the same locality. But under modern conditions this rarely happens. The available world is larger. The son goes elsewhere.

The idea, however, was clear in Fred's conventional mind. It, perhaps, more subtly represented in tangible form that future which must be desirable since the present was so irksomely unsatisfactory. Fred's was a simple soul, but it lived and reached ceaselessly.

IV

Breakfast the next morning seemed interminable to Minnie's eagerness. At length it was finished; and Southworth, lighting a cigarette, stepped out into the grounds of the Mansion to enjoy the soft and gentle morning. Minnie followed him.

"No, don't stop smoking," she answered his gesture at throwing away his cigarette. "Let's walk up and down. I want to talk to you—on business."

They fell into step and slowly paced down the long sweep of the lawn.

"You said you had not decided on your next piece of work." Minnie went directly at the subject in her usual manner. "Could not you make it this house of mine?"

Southworth stopped short.

"Oh, my dear lady!" he cried, "I would not have you think for the world that——"

"I don't, I don't for a minute," Minnie interrupted him eagerly. "I know you never dreamed of such a thing as you imply. But no one can do what I want as you can—No one!"

"There are many excellent men," said Southworth, "and this really does place me in a very embarrassing position. Oh, I do appreciate the compliment, I assure you!" he hastened to add.

"You must dismiss from your mind any thought of the kind," urged Minnie. "I do assure you, I feel strongly I am asking a favour, a very great favour. Your ideas are so thoroughly in harmony with my own; you understand the situation so exactly. I shall be broken-hearted, absolutely broken-hearted, if you will not help me."

Southworth resumed his walk. His brow was bent thoughtfully.

"I cannot deny the problem appeals to me," he confessed at last; "and you are very flattering."

"Then you will?"

Southworth shrugged perplexedly.

"There are so many things to be thought of. This is not an affair to be conducted at a distance by means of a few blue prints and a supervising subordinate. I should have to give all my time to it. It is very easy to sketch an elevation in a few minutes: it is quite a different matter to construct item by item all the details of such an affair as we have been discussing."

"That is why I want you," said Minnie.

"I confess the idea appeals to me. But—I should, I suppose, have to close my New York office for a time. I have never before happened to encounter quite that situation."

Their walk had brought them to the high iron bars of the boundary fence, and they were standing side by side staring through them with unseeing eyes. Minnie laughed self-consciously.

"I realize fully that we would be your entire profession for a time. It is a favour, isn't it?"

This speech broke the spell of delicate tension. Southworth

had really been saying that he was a deuce of a fellow in his profession and that she would have to pay for him; Minnie had replied that she intended to hang expense and was willing to pay for him. Which point settled with due and appropriate nicety, they turned with one accord and began to saunter back up the slope of the lawn.

"Well," decided Southworth, "if you really feel that way, and if Mr. Kirby agrees, I will undertake it."

"Wonderful!" cried Minnie. "We will begin at once then! Fred feels as I do about it."

"I think myself we should lose no time," coincided Southworth. "The winter will be none too long to work out the detailed plans and to get our bids. Then we can undertake actual construction as soon as spring comes. I might work out the preliminary sketches in New York."

But that did not suit Minnie at all. She could not contemplate the postponement.

"But the time to decide things is at the beginning," she objected. "That is the time really to work out ideas."

"I must agree with you there," concurred the architect. "But, you see, I have my office, my draughtsmen, in New York."

"You must bring them here. And *you* will stay with us, of course."

"I would not think of that," deprecated Southworth, "I do not doubt I will be able to find very comfortable quarters."

"The hotel is impossible," said Minnie decisively. "No, we have loads of room, and we shall be delighted to have you: it will be a real pleasure."

"To me, at least," accepted Southworth gracefully.

"Then that is settled!" cried Minnie buoyantly. "When can we begin actual work?"

"Could you be ready for me in, say, ten days?"

"To-morrow if necessary."

"Very well. Then I will be back with one draughtsman inside the fortnight. And suppose in the meantime you sketch out roughly what you want to include in your ground plan. You don't need to draw anything to scale, you know—just a rough idea."

CHAPTER XLI

I

THE major business in life that winter was ground plans and elevations. Minnie "went out," of course, and entertained, and did some committee work; but she did these things with her left hand, as it were, just to keep them from running down, so that later, when she should be ready to enter the main current of life again, the engines would not have rusted. For the same reason she cut down to a minimum the attention she now paid to her household affairs. She fully realized that too much was being left to the good-will and judgment of the servants, and that undoubtedly even a superficial investigation would puncture the ornamental crust and disclose waste and dereliction. When this urgent business was over she would see to it: at present she had no time or energy for such things.

The same with Zozo. He received from his mother now the scantiest of oversight, but Minnie could congratulate herself that the machine she had constructed could be safely trusted to function smoothly. That was the comfort of having a machine: that was the reward for the minute pains expended on its contrivance. Angélique and Mr. Harmon, Zozo's present tutor, knew what to do. Later, when the house was finished, she could more indulge her natural affection.

The same with Cousin Jim. Minnie did feel a little guilty about Cousin Jim. She had barely exchanged a dozen words with him in months. He had given up calling at the Mansion, but he prowled about Burton Lake occasionally, and did not appear to be offended in any way. At least, he was always cheerful. But she never really *saw* him any more; and she was a little uneasy as in some way at an unfulfilled obligation. When this rush of planning and construction was over she would do something about Cousin Jim.

Minnie had this advantage over Fred—that she was capable of subordinating all other things to the immediately important. Fred's nature required the fulfilment of his habit of mind first.

For that reason his office work still drove him. He had his hands full because with him financial affairs must be tidy before he could rest. It hurt him to see money lying idle, so that he was continually studying investment. It hurt him to neglect reinvestment possibilities, so that constantly he was appraising the desirability of selling old securities and buying new. He had not had as yet sufficient opportunity to estimate the trustworthiness of his agents and employees, so that endlessly he was checking up and supervising their activities. And on the other side, as though shut off in his mind from the income by an impervious wall, were the expenditures. If balanced with that income they were insignificant; but Fred's standard was only gradually expanding from the days when ten thousand a year seemed comfortable wealth. Compared to that they were colossal, of course; and subconsciously that worried him.

II

It would have jarred Minnie somewhat could she have appreciated just how calmly her postponed responsibilities were taking the postponement.

Little Falls lived very much its own life, except when it was galvanized into speed by its contact with the Kirbys. Then everybody took a brace and put on a little more "dog," and pranced about trying to act as though they kept French butlers in the chicken coop. They enjoyed it, but on the whole they were secretly glad that it did not happen oftener, for it was quite a strain. Their social muscles would gain strength by more exercise, which they realized they were going to get as soon as the new house was finished; but in the meantime they were sneakingly appreciative of themselves.

Zozo was thoroughly pleased. Ultimate authority seemed to have been almost wholly withdrawn. It was bewildering but fascinating. Zozo was not extraordinarily clever, but he was plenty clever enough to realize that the son and heir of Twelve Millions could—within reason—put it over any mere machine ever devised. In a remarkably brief space of time he had learned to gauge accurately just how far he could go without being referred to headquarters, and he went exactly that far. As he also possessed the self-centred contempt for public opinion peculiar to his age, he rapidly developed into what was sweepingly described as a "cub."

Fine general term that! It covers such a variety of causes and effects, such heterogeneous and unlike products of misunderstanding, thwarted impulse, wrong education, and natural depravity! It lumps them all together as though they were one and similar, when in reality they may have no relationship at all.

Take the case of Zozo. He had all his life lived under the most minute authority; now all at once he was released from any real authority at all. Of course, there were certain surface observances or there was trouble, but Zozo knew, as well as did the unfortunate Angélique and Mr. Harmon, that it was not wise to bother Madame, who was now so deep in affairs, unless it was absolutely necessary; and he took full advantage of that fact. It was power, and he was drunk with it. He could not handle it. How should he? He had never managed anything in his life: how could he now manage himself? He was like a body that had grown without developing the structure of bone or the strength of muscle; oozing over life like a lava flow on the lines of least resistance. He had made no thought trails: a curious wilderness mind!

Dimly he had noticed that he was getting a little more attention from his logical playmates because of the possibilities of some of his possessions, and he had taken a natural advantage of the fact; but he had not responded naturally, and had not really acquired intimates from those of his own age. He had enjoyed his new prestige with them in a tepid sort of way, but what he really liked was his position as the little lord of the manor. Indeed, he was with his equals always just a trifle conscious of his deficiencies of experience. They spoke an argot he only partly understood, they played team games he had never had an opportunity to become skilful in, they possessed a freemasonry of which his solitary upbringing had deprived him. He was self-consciously awkward with them, though he did not particularly care for their opinion of him one way or another. And as a natural consequence he was always at ease with those beneath him and was deeply affected by comments he might overhear in the kitchen wing or by teasing allusions as to the greatness of his future estate from a lot of maids.

But he possessed freedom of a sort. He certainly would not have hastened the day when his mother could have more time for him!

He didn't even have to do his duty calls on Cousin Jim. The

immature mind is barbarically materialistic. The Gun Complex had been utterly cast out by the Motor-Car Complex. On Saturday afternoon Minnie had people in to her own house, and as a consequence that period was customarily devoted by Etienne to greasing and oiling and generally repairing the monster. If the monster had no ailments, he was prepared to take Zozo out and let him drive. Could any one imagine willingly absenting oneself at such a time? Of course, Zozo liked Cousin Jim, but nowadays he almost never saw him. The childish trust and intimacy receded into a remote background as though swept by the wind of new things.

Only remained beating blindly in its cribbed and cabined confines the spirit that Cousin Jim had touched to life.

CHAPTER XLII

I

BY THE time Southworth had made his arrangements and had returned, Minnie and Fred had filled sheets and sheets of paper with "rough ideas." Fred had taken a good deal of interest in this. His interest was dashed when item by item Southworth showed most of the rough ideas to be mechanically impractical. And apparently the rough ideas fell between two stools. Southworth explained this very nicely over the men's cigars in the library.

"You see," said he, "you are going in here at considerable expense to build what is to be a permanent thing. It is manifestly bad economy to compromise on what should be ultimately satisfactory. If you are not satisfied, if you later go about saying to yourselves, 'I wish while I was about it I had done so and so,' your entire investment, as far as ultimate satisfaction is concerned, is as good as wasted. It will then be too late to change."

"What do you mean, exactly?" demanded the practical Fred.

"Well, take the size of your own bedroom."

"What's the matter with that? I don't want to hold a political convention in it. It's larger than the one I've got, and that's big enough for anybody."

"It's big enough, in a way; but you will find, when you consider, that adding as little as five feet to each dimension will make the difference between a feeling of space and elbow room and a feeling of just a place to sleep."

"Do you know," confided Fred, "that's just what I want my bedroom for."

Southworth laughed good-humouredly.

"You might want it to be ill in," he suggested, lightly. "But, seriously, with modern furniture and hangings, I think you are going to find it very difficult to get an effect with the dimensions you have marked here."

"I don't give a hang for an effect in my bedroom," persisted Fred.

Southworth perceived that he had chosen an unfortunate example, and switched to Minnie. Here he had better luck. It was agreed without discussion that her own room, at least, should add to its dimensions.

That was a simple and harmless little victory, it would seem—unless one realizes how slight a foothold the grandiose needs. There's a certain *proportion* to these things, as Southworth had shrewdly pointed out. That phrase worked wonders. If Minnie's bedroom was larger, then the corresponding rooms must be larger, too, to keep the proportion. *Ergo* the outside of the house must be larger; *ergo* the rooms underneath must be larger. To his bewilderment Fred found his own room became automatically larger.

"The *space* is there," Minnie herself pointed out, a little impatiently. "It's *got* to be."

This seemed to be so. If you increase the size of the outside of a wall the inside of that wall seems to follow suit, somehow. The enlargement proceeded as simply as the swelling of a soap bubble.

Another potent phrase was, "While we're about it it would be a pity to spoil it for lack of——" This opened the door for the fifth-wheel type of thing that the Kirbys felt no need for but that might come handy—especial rooms for pressing clothes, for arranging flowers, for billiards, for the forced drying of laundry, and all the "modern" knick-knacks of convenience that often in themselves require more effort than they save. But they all added to the general mass and required rearrangement and amplification of plan.

The young man at the draughting table in the third story was kept very busy indeed. Dozens of plans were drawn, studied, altered, criticized, redrawn, and discarded. Fred soon fell behind, fell out. The multiplicity of detail bored him, wearied him. He could not arouse his mind after so much other detail at the office, especially as he seemed to be dead wrong most of the time. Shortly he made no attempt to understand.

The fetish of consistency set itself up to be worshipped. Much of the foreign accumulations and the present furnishings of the Mansion turned out to be worthless for the present need. They were, Southworth pointed out, beautiful and valuable in

themselves; but inappropriate—impossible! As though, he said, Minnie were to wear that stunning turban she had bought at Callot's with the spangled evening gown from Paquin.

They wrangled and quarrelled and disputed and finally agreed, with an astounding fund of attention and energy. Fred was more and more out of it. He did bob up unexpectedly every once in a while with some strange patent contraption that he had come across and which he recommended enthusiastically: such things as patent door stoppers or "handy" screen openers or automatic thermostats. Most of them exasperated Minnie because they were extraneous to the discussion, checked progress, consumed energy, had to be argued about out of turn; but Southworth always treated them respectfully. His patience was infinite.

II

It was the latter part of February before the plans were quite finished. They had been finally drawn and blue printed. Southworth had spent long solitary days writing what, when typed, looked like a history of the Civil War in its bulk and impressiveness. This was the "Specifications," in which he had had the help of another young man who, with a typewriter, had taken the place of the draughtsman in the third story. The volume contained exact descriptions of every little item that was to go into the construction of that house, down to the very material of the fly screens. A stupendous work!

At last, just at twilight, when tea was being spread in the big living room, the architect appeared, somewhat flushed, his arms full of rolled blue prints and the bulky specifications in his hand.

"There!" he declared triumphantly, depositing his burden on the table with a gesture, "All done! All finished! There's your house!"

III

No one who has built even a bungalow needs his feelings harrowed by a description of the Building of the Palace. Detail, detail, and yet more detail. Aggravation on aggravation. Delay on delay. Expense on expense. Things going wrong. Mess. Things delayed. Things broken. Things refused because of mistake or flaw. Mess and welter. Friction of labour; threat of strike. Illness of special artisans difficult to replace. Always the unexpected, the absolutely unforeseeable, just when things

seemed about to run smoothly. Small annoyances by the dozens which loomed big because there were no big annoyances to take their places. Petty recriminations, result of tautened nerves. Last-minute changes to be made, all of which cost extravagantly; extras not foreseen to be added, also at a higher price. Minnie high-wrought, nervous, exacting, almost quarrelsome at times, caught in a nightmare, the ultimate vision very dim. Fred sunk back to weary detachment, paying the bills grimly with a world of unexpressed comment behind his closed lips, refusing absolutely to become involved in it in any way. Southworth quiet, unobtrusively weathering the unpopularity that comes as part of the architect's job at a certain stage of the game.

And through it all the project itself growing, slowly, slowly, but steadily, toward completion.

The first estimates were staggering, but Fred managed to rise to a steady contemplation of them. The actual costs overwhelmed and engulfed him, like a dragon in dreams. It was something beyond struggle. He simply humped his back and took it dumbly.

Occasionally of a Sunday, when all the workmen were gone and he could slip out there and prowling around all by himself, he rather enjoyed some of it. Perhaps if he had had more of a part in it he might have found in these big things a real inspiration; but he was in reality only an onlooker to the proceedings, which to a man of his temperament could not be deeply amusing for long.

And even this little pleasure was never of long duration. One of the favourite Sunday sports of any populace anywhere is the clambering about new houses—until they are closed off to the public by the installation of the doors and windows. For a time about half the town drove out to Burton Lake on the Sabbath and hitched their animals to the trees and fences, and pervaded the entire place in solemn prowling Sundayfied groups. The thing got to be a moderately damaging nuisance. It came at last to the point of erecting a most undemocratic high patent fence—at an absurd price per foot—about the entire two hundred acres, and the installation of a watchman at the gate. Public resentment, naturally! Kirbys getting stuck up and putting on airs! And only partially effective. It was a dull Sunday when some adventurous band did not discover a way in, by land or water, and had not to be escorted out resentful and grumbling.

But there were plenty who got through the temporary gates

by right of acquaintanceship,—the great iron grill, especial design and cost five thousand, was still in the ironworks. Fred became a sort of guide. He and Minnie were always showing people around. That was not so bad: there was continual interest in that; if only everybody wasn't so full of suggestions! The thing grew like yeast. Even Mr. Harmon, Zozo's tutor, materialized a vision of a playhouse schoolroom. Some of these suggestions were good enough to be adopted. The playhouse schoolroom was planned and built, and in the sequel received just about ten minutes a week of the boy's vastly perverse attention. Everybody who came to the place seemed to have expensive dreams of perfection which somehow managed to become necessities.

Fortunately—from Fred's point of view—Southworth at this stage of the game spent only about two days a week on the job (travelling expenses on the bill). A minion of his did the supervising, but merely carried out orders and was always immersed in blue prints. Whenever Southworth appeared Fred vanished. He knew better now than to offer suggestions: they merely cost him something. Not that the suggestions were ever accepted. Take the hardware and the plumbing fixtures, for example. In the innocence of his heart he thought one of his business connections could save him some money on these. That bright idea merely started them off on having the fixtures made to order on especial designs. Fred's catalogues showed nothing sufficiently "distinguished" or "artistic." He was getting pretty grumpy about that word "artistic." It meant a distressing combination of utter impracticability and expense. The conjunction of Minnie and Southworth also meant fresh trouble. When they were together Fred lurked balefully just out of range, with a furtively suspicious eye on them. If they called to him to come over for a moment, he obeyed with all the enthusiasm of a setter dog approaching a master with a switch. If, on enquiry, the inevitable new proposal proved to be "artistic," his worst fears were confirmed.

IV

Indeed, about this time Fred from some unexpected depths developed a dry and caustic wit that was a delight to his friends but an annoyance to Minnie. It had little kinship with what we are accustomed to call a "sense of humour." That presupposes a proportion, a balance, a kindliness; while this manifestation of

Fred's came from a rather bitter resignation. Generally it was both ill-timed and unjust—that is what annoyed Minnie—but there could be no two opinions that it was funny.

He held forth from the head of his table, while Minnie tried to divert or soft-pedal, and the guests egged him on.

"Great game architecture," said he. "If Zozo doesn't turn out to be a really first-class burglar, I'll turn him into an architect."

"I gather you look on architects as crooks," Bob Post played up relishingly.

"Oh, no, you're wrong. Several of them are not. Southworth is a fine chap; got the greatest respect for him. Architects are straight enough. But the profession is crooked."

"Fred's getting subtle," chuckled Pine. "Shouldn't be allowed. How do you figure it out, Fred?"

"They invite you in to play the game, and they have all kinds of rules they spring on you that you would never suspect. 'Customs of the trade' they call 'em. You haven't a show."

"I wish, Fred, you'd drop that tiresome joke," complained Minnie, but with a laugh to take the edge off.

"Joke, hey?" Fred cocked one eye in her direction. "Well, I joked yesterday about ten thousand unexpected dollars' worth on it."

"Tell us," urged old Atkins, smoothing down his white waistcoat in anticipation.

But Fred preferred the general dissertation to the specific instance.

"You let 'em work out a plan for a house," said he, "and you ask 'em for a bid. 'Ten thousand dollars,' says they. You count your money and you've got eleven thousand salted down, so you say, 'great, old man, fly to it!' Then you sit back and wait until the time when your house is all done and you can step into it. Does it work that way? It does not! 'Where,' you ask some day, 'are the door-knobs, the electric light fixtures, the front steps?' 'Oh, those are extras,' says they, 'if you want them you got to have another estimate.' 'But, jumping giraffes,' says you, 'every house has to have them—especially front steps. Front steps are part of a house. Front steps were on the plan that I asked for estimates on. The house is no *good* to me without front steps. Why should I or any sane man buy a house without front steps?' 'It's a custom of the trade never to include

front steps,' says they, looking shocked at your ignorance. And by George, it *is* a custom of their silly trade; but how am I to know that?"

He paused to sip his coffee.

"What do you do about it?" asked Mrs. Post.

"Do? You give in: you've got to—unless you want to get into your house with a ladder. You get an estimate on front steps. You find front steps will cost you three thousand. And all the other customs of the trade will stand you in a lot more. No, sir, don't you fool yourself! That original estimate is just bait, a come-on, to get you to sit in the game. The real profit is in the 'extras.'"

"You are very unjust, Fred," said Minnie, rising, "and you know it."

Even some of the most practical things drew his fire at times.

"My God, boys, think of it!"—he wagged his head solemnly—"I've lived all these years without an incinerator! You've no idea how I've suffered! Just imagine, all this time my tin cans have been thrown out on the common city dump, all mixed in with nobody-knows-whose-else's! Spread out with all those common cans filling up land to grow more tomatoes to fill more cans! I was forced to it by poverty, but you bank plutocrats ought to be ashamed of yourselves. Wasters, that's what you are! Don't you know it's a patriotic duty to consume your own tin cans and use the ashes to grow mushrooms in? The extravagance of you common Americans is beyond belief!"

He spoke with grave countenance, unmoved by his companions' laughter. These things, in final analysis, really vexed Minnie because they were the reflex of Fred's lost battles—whether he had fought them out or not.

The five-thousand-dollar wrought-iron gate was in, a thing of beauty with gilded tips and lace-like intricate scrollwork. To pay that amount of money for a mere gate impressed Fred perhaps as deeply as any single item. Whenever he passed it he took off his hat to it reverentially; and he taught Zozo to do the same.

"You are *too* ridiculous!" cried Minnie; but he continued to do it long after the flavour of the joke had evaporated.

All the visitors to the place tried to be appreciative and intelligent. Now that the house was up and the whole scheme was working toward definite shape, even the dullest must be impressed by the evidence of minute planning, be seized by the beauty and

harmony of the general scheme. It was only appropriate to rave over it, and to strain your poor intellect to the unassisted discovery of effects that had been carefully intended. Quite a triumph to ring a bell that way! It was a further mark of intelligence if one could go into an artistic frenzy over chances for swimming pools—such an ideal setting for the composition!—or suggest a quaint idea for a bowling green! This aspect of the visitor filled Fred with uneasiness, for at any given moment some inspired idiot might suggest something that would appeal to Minnie or Southworth. Before entering the grounds he would halt the group impressively.

“Now, look here,” said he, “before we start let me ask you one favour. If you have any ideas for polo fields, or croquet grounds, or squash courts or anything like that, would you mind, as a personal favour, keeping them to yourselves? Do not take us into your confidence. If you have inspiration, dissemble. Talk about the weather. Bottle up within you all drinking fountains, dog fountains, horse fountains, or cat fountains. I shall consider it a friendly turn.”

V

It takes some time to build a palace, even when one pays for speed, money no object. In the meantime one continues to move and have his being. The Kirbys definitely looked upon the house as a preliminary, but it was an absorbing preliminary. The days were all bent toward its completion, after which presumably would come the time to live. The environment must be ready before one can get definitely started. Intercourse with friends, the very day's sunshine, hung suspended, unmet by any response or enjoyment, until this great rush of construction was over. There was no moment of relaxation to the thing that after all was the really momentous—this day that is apportioned, this little cycle of the hour that makes people what they are.

Nevertheless, the time was potent. Neither Minnie nor Fred was exactly the same being at the end of the period as at the beginning. The surface of ordered life was broken, and growth followed the ploughing. Only one vast vision could have discerned what patterns were in the making. At least great efforts were forward; and it is a law that always effort must accomplish one thing or another. Something new was in the making; something old was in the dying.

CHAPTER XLIII

I

THE year following the advent of the first monster great advances were made in automobile construction. The engine came out from beneath and had a house of its own up forward. Two cylinders became four. The rear door gave way to a high polished stern like the poop of a caravel. Obviously the Kirbys had to have one of these. It, too, came from abroad, to the exasperation of the patriotic who assured each other that no better cars were made than American cars. There were a good many of the latter in Little Falls. Horses had decided to accept the inevitable, the public was reconciled. The old monster fell back to the estate of a sort of servants' car and general roustabout. But the true significance was in the fact that by the time the palace was finished the horses had been sold and the old vehicles they used to draw disposed of for a song. Minnie, as usual, was ahead of the game. She definitely committed herself to gasoline, summer and winter alike.

At last the new house, long finished to all appearance, was reluctantly abandoned by the last of the persistent artisans who do final puttery things and who seem to have settled down definitely and comfortably for life. There ensued the brief period of moving in. This Minnie insisted on attending to personally and as much in secret as the assistance of fourteen servants and a small army of supernumeraries can command. The Five Thousand Dollar Gates were jealously guarded. Of the employing class only Minnie and the faithful Camilla were permitted to pass them. Even Fred was turned back.

"But I own the place!" he cried to the gatekeeper, who was a stranger with a firm jaw and a detective's badge under his coat.

"Sorry, sir, strict orders," returned the man, without troubling to question the statement.

Fred had driven out in the two-seater he had recently purchased. He said it was a necessity, as it enabled him to get to the office

promptly. As a matter of fact he rather liked the thing. It was one of the new Pope-Hartfords, with a rounded hood of impressive size held down by a business-like strap. It rumbled with a voice of authority. Fred excused its sixty horsepower—the original monster had had twelve!—by the specious plea that it wasn't speed he wanted, but the opposite: and that it took a lot of power to run both slowly and smoothly. This was true, but was jeered at by his friends. But it was true also that Fred never drove faster than thirty miles an hour in any circumstance. Zozo looked on the Pope-Hartford with envy. It was the one car he had never been privileged to drive.

While Fred hesitated at the gate Minnie rolled down the driveway on her way home in the Mercedes.

"Look here," Fred called to her good-humouredly, as her vehicle came to a stop alongside his own, "call off your watch dog here before he bites me. I want to go in and see about that piece of work Willitts has just finished."

But Minnie smilingly shook her head.

"I should think a man might be allowed to go on his own property," said Fred with a trace of resentment.

Minnie reached toward the handle of the door but was instantly forestalled by the watchful Etienne. She descended daintily into the driveway and came across to Fred's car.

"If you'll make me room," she suggested, "I'll let you drive me home. It isn't your property, my lord," she answered Fred's complaint, as she settled herself, "until day after to-morrow afternoon. Then I shall expect you to leave the office at promptly three o'clock and drive directly out here—— *Goodness*, what was that?"

"Gears. Hard to get in," muttered Fred, reddening. "Etienne ought to have attended to that clutch."

"We really ought to have another man in the garage. It isn't fair to expect him to do three cars and drive, too. But as I was saying, you will drive directly out here prepared to receive the keys of the city."

"Is them orders, ma'am?" queried Fred.

"Them's orders."

II

At the appointed hour Fred, secretly amused, appeared at his own gate, and this time was permitted to roll down the driveway,

around the great sweeping curve of the grade, and to the wide balustraded terrace in front of the palace. As he drove slowly he looked about him with a fresh eye of detachment. Everything looked new, of course, but surprisingly in order. No trace of the litter and débris of building remained. The driveway, composed of a patented material, had been freshly raked its whole length, so that to all appearance his wheel tracks were the first to mark its surface. Alongside, the herbaceous planting looked as though it had been grown naturally on the premises, instead of having been transplanted full size—at an expense. The spaced classic urns along the terrace balustrade already were draped with hanging veils of vine. Only the façade of the house itself looked the least bit raw and new. One cannot completely command the slow processes of time when it comes to mellowing and the clothing of ivy and creeper.

Fred drove up the width of the spacious terrace to the sheltered entrance, where he brought the car to a stop. A young man in the conventional chauffeur livery stepped forward and touched his cap.

"I'll drive your car to the garage, sir," he suggested, as Fred hesitated.

Fred examined him more closely.

"I don't seem to remember you," said he.

"No, sir. I am Thornton, the new chauffeur."

"New chauffeur, eh? Etienne quit?"

"Oh, no, sir. I am to assist him."

Fred digested this in silence for a moment.

"All right," said he at length, preparing to descend. "Do you know how to drive this kind of a car?"

"I came from the Pope-Hartford factory."

Fred said nothing more but turned under the arched entrance way. There were no front steps. One entered on a level with the ground and did his climbing inside up a replica of the staircase of the Grand Opéra of Paris. At his approach the door swung open. This no longer gave him a thrill: he was accustomed to it. His hat and coat were deftly filched from him. He mounted the right-hand staircase.

Where the two staircases joined, Minnie awaited him. She was exquisitely gowned. Any woman would have seen at once that rather extra pains had been taken with her turnout; but all Fred knew was that she was looking particularly well, and that

with her shining eyes and high colour of excitement she stirred in him a feeling that the stress of life had—not abated—but overlaid, dimmed.

She dropped him a deep curtsy of the old-fashioned manner.

"Welcome, my lord, to your new domain!" she said.

"By jove, Minnie, you're as pretty as a picture," cried Fred.

Impulsively he put his arms around her and kissed her. She clung to him with a sudden almost forgotten fervour; then she pushed him away, laughing.

"Come with me," she commanded, "and behave yourself!"

She conducted him on a personal tour. Fred was astonished. They might have been living there for years. Even the guest rooms had postage stamps on their desks and toothbrushes in antiseptic original packages. That impressed Fred as much as anything, and he was inclined to linger over them in astonishment. With a trace of impatience, which however quickly vanished, Minnie insisted that he proceed. It was bewildering! Even the evening paper on the little table in his own room—yes, and a surreptitious peek into a drawer showed him that his own personal and private arrangement of his own personal and private things had been respected and duplicated. The sight softened him. Minnie's bright efficiency had always half-mocked, half-represented his incomprehensible stubbornness in preferring to keep his things in that idiotic way; yet here they were, the way he wanted them!

They went over the huge place from top to bottom. It was all prepared for inspection, complete to the last button. Everything, including the humans, was in its place. Camilla, representively joyous, had a department. She was found seated symbolically before her desk, with its disappearing typewriter, its card index, its cabinet file, its neat cupboard of all sorts of stationery. There was also a desk for Minnie in this room, and a revolving case of reference books, a house telephone, and a whole row of push buttons. Nevertheless, it was more like a bright and cheerful sitting room than a place of business, with its open fireplace, its gay curtains, its pictures on the wall, its comfortable chairs. Camilla had a large bedroom just off it, which she showed a little hesitatingly. There was another smaller room with a sink, a wide platform table, and many cupboards, devoted exclusively to the arrangement of flowers.

Of late Camilla had subdued to a considerable extent the effer-

vescence of yore; but to-day under this tremendous stimulus she only partially contained herself. Everything was so wonderful, transcendent, consummate, unparalleled, exquisite, and divine that Fred left her at the confines of her territory with the feeling that he had just managed to get in out of the rain before his mackintosh began to leak.

Even Mr. Harmon and Zozo were discovered giving an imitation of teacher and pupil in the model schoolroom.

III

From the house they went out together into the grounds. Here there was not so much that was unfamiliar to Fred, but the servants' quarters interested him. This was a structure of considerable size, though low and well set in shrubbery. It had a large central living room, with bedrooms at either end. The living room was attractively furnished in cretonnes, with a rug, easy chairs, several good prints on the walls, and a "talking machine," then a great novelty.

"It really isn't expensive," Minnie explained this, "and it gives them some definite amusement." The bedrooms, too, were attractive, and the bathrooms were white tiled.

"Darn sight better layout than *we* ever had for a good many years," observed Fred.

"You've got to make them comfortable if you are going to keep the better class of servants," replied Minnie carelessly.

Fred grinned but was wise enough to say nothing. He remembered their arguments of the old days, and Minnie's fairly belligerent affirmance that the usual cubbyholes were good enough, that was all that class expected, that if given more they got above themselves. He also entertained a fleeting speculation as to how this was going to affect the rest of the servants in Little Falls once it became known.

They went next to the garage, a classic structure that looked when its wide doors were closed as if intended for the worship of the immortal gods. The cars seemed lined up for inspection, glittering with brass and varnish. Minnie's Mercedes stood next Fred's two-seater. Then came a third car, but it was another Pope-Hartford. The old monster stood off at the other end humbly, with two spaces between, as befitted its lowly estate. The second Pope-Hartford was almost an exact duplicate of Fred's except as to colour.

"Who belongs to that car?" he demanded.

Minnie hung on Fred's arm.

"Have you forgotten whose birthday it is to-morrow, dear?" she asked.

Fred thought a moment.

"By thunder, I had!" he cried, "but look here, you don't mean to tell me that you are going to give that *boy* a thing like that?"

"He drives as well as Etienne. Etienne says so himself. Is not that so, Etienne?"

"Mais oui, madame. Mieux, au fait."

"And he's fourteen years old now."

"It strikes me that's a pretty expensive present to give such a kid. You're going to spoil him, sure as——"

How tiresome! Fred was off again on the old track! Had she to go into it all over again for the hundredth time, proving to him mathematically what he already knew, that the few thousands this mechanism had cost were as a drop out of the bucket? And the occasion was so perfect up to now!

But Fred had the same thought, which was the first time this had happened. Evidently his education was slowly having its effect.

"But I suppose he *is* big enough to do his own driving," he hastened to add. He put his head on one side surveying humorously the brilliant vermilion of the body colour. "I suppose," he commented, "that the idea is if he likes it to paint it *red* next time. Does he know?"

"Not an inkling," rejoined Minnie, laughing.

"How have you kept him away from the garage?" asked Fred interestedly.

"Strong methods; harsh measures."

"I thought he looked rather glum just now."

"Well, he'll get over it in the morning. But it's getting late: we must run. Good-night," she called back gaily over her shoulder to the men.

They paused for a moment on the terrace in front of the house. Here the land sloped away toward the west. A fringe of aspens, willows, and birch partly screened the lake, and between their boles the water could be seen shining with the afterglow. Their tops etched the sunset sky.

Fred slipped his arm about her waist. She dropped her head against his shoulder.

CHAPTER XLIV

I

BUT unshared enjoyment of the new house was not at all in Minnie's scheme of things. They could not shut the Five Thousand Dollar Gates and keep the world out. The world had waited long enough. It clamoured to see, and Minnie wanted it to see. Only not in driblets. She had no intention of diluting her effect.

For some time, it appeared, Camilla had been busy filling in names on engraved invitations and addressing envelopes. There was to be a house-warming. In the meantime the Gates remained shut. Callers were informed by the lodge keeper that Madame was not yet receiving. Minnie answered protests of her intimates with smiles and mysteries. Then the invitations came out, and all was understood.

In regard to the latter Minnie and Fred came close to a row over the question of one guest. During the past few years the subject of Minnie's brother, Freeman, had been tacitly abandoned by both. With Minnie's growing sophistication in regard to money matters had come a little fuller understanding of just Freeman's situation. She had accepted the fiction agreed upon—that of Freeman's splendid but engrossing opportunities in the East—and had carried it off well. Between herself and Fred his name had never been mentioned, although Fred knew that she had seen Freeman on the occasions of her New York visits.

Now one evening after dinner she tackled the subject with a directness and hardness that would have been impossible to her a few years before. "I want to talk to you seriously a few moments, and I want you to be reasonable," she stated. "I've invited Freeman to the party, and I have written him urging him to come. I think he will."

Fred shrank within himself uneasily, as though something indelicate had been mentioned. Family matters of this sort were,

in his way of feeling, to be avoided by a nice mutual understanding. He tried to formulate his objection in the indirection of decency. But Minnie cut across ruthlessly.

"I know you don't want him, and I know why."

Fred started to say something.

"Oh, I know it was embezzlement in the eyes of the law," she broke in impatiently. "I'm not defending him." She surveyed Fred's red and embarrassed face with a slight relaxing in amusement. He was as shamefaced as though she had suddenly started a frank sex discussion in mixed company. "But after all we've got appearances to consider. In spite of the fact that Freeman is in New York and so extraordinarily busy that he has not been to see us in years"—her tone was faintly ironical—"it would seem very strange to everybody if he did not come out for as important an affair as our house-warming."

She arose and walked to the other side of the room and back, stopping at last squarely before Fred's miserable figure.

"I'm willing to concede that you know the business etiquette in such matters—though I think it is sometimes, as in this case, very limited and silly. But you must permit me to know, in my turn, the social etiquette and what it demands."

"I see your point," Fred hesitated. "I suppose you're right about it in a way. But—you see—it's not really up to me. There was an interview—Pine made quite a concession—but it was—well, more or less contingent—quite definitely contingent—"

"You mean he let Freeman off if he would leave," Minnie translated.

"That was it," agreed Fred, confused for her by this directness.

"And that he threatened to put him in jail if he ever came back."

"Well—yes."

"Pine! Pine!" she repeated. "A little country-town banker! As if you couldn't handle Pine!"

Fred stared at her, unseeing. Her words had, as a light touch on the kaleidoscope, made for him an entire rearrangement of values that had apparently before persisted only because unquestioned. In Fred's old days Pine had, as the leading money power of Little Falls, been quite the most solid and powerful figure in the immediate business world, a man to be looked to with respect. It had never, until the moment, occurred to Fred to look on him otherwise. Now he did look at him in the light of Minnie's last

speech, and a savage inflow of power brimmed his soul. By Jove, he *could* handle Pine!

II

So Freeman was invited, and came, along with the other members of the house party. He was rather a fat Freeman, inclined to be a trifle fussy in manner, and he avoided any intimate contact with Fred so successfully that there was little embarrassment.

The house party were a distinguished lot, hand-picked to adorn the party as flowers are hand-picked to adorn a table. It may or may not please the flowers; but that point is of secondary importance. They were people the Kirbys had met abroad and elsewhere—of those mentioned some time back as having been pigeonholed in Minnie's mind for future reference. There were Senator Elton and his wife (those were the days when it was naïvely assumed that senators were *per se* distinguished and intelligent); Mr. and Mrs. Sylvester Compton of New York, who represented the uttermost of the sophisticated smart society life; Southworth, of course (Minnie was secretly relieved to find the Comptons seemed to find that he "belonged"); and two dancing men and three ornamental and dashing girls calculated to smite Little Falls where it lived. All these people brought maids and valets and an air of the great world at once worshipful and exasperating to the humble villagers. They disappeared within the Gates. Prominent families immediately left cards.

There was plenty of room in the palace for the lot, and to spare. They had bedrooms, and dressing rooms, and private sitting rooms, and tubs and showers and needle sprays apiece; and their servants retired—when they retired—to the accommodations of a comfort and convenience which, as Fred had said, were unknown to the Kirbys themselves ten years ago. Awaiting their disposal at any hour of day or night were motor cars, drinks, smokes, boats, swims, saddle horses, tennis courts, books, card tables, easy chairs, and Fred. Two things were denied them for the present: one wholly, the other partially—Minnie, and the whole lower floor of the palace. The big front entrance was barred. They went in at a side door, and lived, moved, and enjoyed their indoor existence entirely in the upper stories. The lower floor was given over to mysterious and tremendous activity and to many workmen. Minnie permitted no one even a peek. She herself, with due apologies, spent most of her time there.

That did not worry the distinguished guests. They were gracefully polite about it, but they did not really need Minnie. The other facilities were quite to their taste. Fred made an excellent host. He was a trifle afraid of the sophisticated young people, so they were free unsupervised to hit the high spots with the above-mentioned facilities. He distributed drinks and *vuelto abajo* cigars with a free hand. His house was theirs. They took him at his word and looked more luxuriously at home therein than he did. Each evening they all went forth to some lesser function. This house-warming was taken seriously by Little Falls. Other prominent families had house guests, too. It was a week of gaiety.

The lower part of the palace swarmed like an ant heap. Workmen, decorators, electricians, florists, furniture men—a whole army—dashed in and out and hammered and heaved and shouted. Vans and trucks clustered about the big entrance. A wrinkled-browed man in shirtsleeves, unsmiling, intent, moving with the repressed nervous deliberation of one husbanding his powers, chewing to shapeless butts a succession of unlighted cigars, bossed the show like a field general.

Minnie was in her element. For the first time she let herself go fully in complete abandon, gave way to the intoxication of success. It was a reaction after the tense demanding strain of the past few years. All inhibitions she threw to the winds. She imposed, for once, no limits; allowed no faintest thought of cost, of expenditure of effort, of possibility even, to interpose in objection before the free flight of her romantic imagination. Into her two hands she gathered regally the results of slow laborious efforts of a multitude of human beings. She saw them toiling for her, an army of them, the world over; all their powers focussed at this one pin-point of time. The training of long special educations, the slowly gathered lore of centuries, the inspiration of many arts, the cunning skill of many trades, the illuminations of genius all brought to her disposal their choicest contributions from the ends of the earth. Explorers had cast daringly far afield, patient men had planted and failed and planted again and triumphed; and other men had been born and been trained and had wrought cunningly their training into hickory and iron that these trucks might stand at her door unloading the very plants that were to adorn her ideas.

It was all hers! all hers! This was to be a splendid, a unique

effort. Anxious-browed studious men laboured to catch her ideas and to carry them out in practical detail. In her reaction she dared to dizzy heights of the unprecedented, heights she never would normally have attained. The picturesque, the colourful, the unusual, the startling in innovation rose to her call like genii. She shuddered at the merest hint of the banal; she recoiled from "regulation" things. She shattered tradition; broke ground daringly. The army of caterers to this sort of pleasure found their tried methods and properties not available. They were driven also to the daring in improvisation. The thing took shape as hers, and hers alone.

The full discovery of this power to project her personality through wealth intoxicated her. And as the projection expanded, so did her personality by natural logic become larger to her. For the first time she felt a just sense of possession. She, rather than another, held this power by divine right simply because she could use it so well. She soared in a heart-and-soul absorption in genuine creation of what the reporters later called a "masterpiece."

CHAPTER XLV

I

AT LAST the great night arrived, and the appointed hour. The guests began to arrive, all agog with curiosity, at the hitherto unknown front portals of the palace. Even the members of the house party embarked at the side door in the motor cars and were conveyed around the drive to the front entrance. They, no more than the inhabitants of Little Falls, had as yet seen the completed lower floor. But they were not to see it in its appointed furnishings even to-night.

They entered from the vestibule and the flanking dressing rooms on either side to find themselves in a northern forest of autumn, done in white and blue and gold. The trunks of yellow birch and white birch trees supported an overarching frond of golden foliage through which one glimpsed the soft blue luminosity of a sky at night. A radiance of indirect lighting romantic as moonlight cast a spell of fairyland through the boles of the forest. Small growing green things were so cunningly disposed that the apparently accidental thickening of them stopped one short of the walls of the room. In consequence one looked out in all directions through a thick screen of leaves to vague skilful half-guessed glimpses of again the deep luminous blue of sky, as though the forest were on an eminence. One end of the long room had been banked to a side hill that mounted to the point of disappearance, carrying its cloak of woodland with it; and down this hill tumbled in a series of fern-moist cascades a little brook. Its fall was luminous with blue light. An iris-bordered pool detained it for a moment, whence it rippled away over gravel shallows. In this pool frogs chirped loudly, an effect that, small in itself, elicited more comment than any other single feature in this wonderland. Their use was the result of an accidental discovery by Minnie herself that frogs chirp when light is turned directly on them. Birds of brilliant plumage and sweet voice fluttered in the fringe of bushes and on the side hill,

cunningly detained by invisible meshes from too wide wanderings. And on the air was wafted the deep pungent smell of the actual smoke-weathered forest of autumn, a hard-won triumph of a celebrated perfumer's laboratory.

The illusion was perfect, the effect was complete. The very servants were dressed, like Robin Hoods, in Lincoln green. A wonderland, an autumn Eden, a fairyland, a dreamlike ideal of an unreal world culled from the ends of the earth!

Soft Indian-like music throbbed from apparently the depths of the forest. It was produced by two harps and three violas, a combination imagined by Minnie, and now justifying in its smooth crooning romance her rather extraordinary efforts to accomplish it. This was no combination that could be picked up ready made, so to speak. The musicians had to create their effect through many—paid for—rehearsals.

The arriving guests greeted Minnie and Fred just inside the vestibule door and passed on to wander about in the moonlit forest. Struck dumb at the doorway, they tried desperately and with varying success to say something appropriate to their hostess. Mostly they babbled and gasped; which was, after all, as good as anything.

The Eltons and Comptons, being birds of a feather had got to be cronies in the course of the past week, enjoying thoroughly the lavish good things of the Kirby hospitality, and sharing tacitly and courteously a faint subterranean amusement. Now they, like the rest, were stricken to momentary flattering immobility as they entered the door.

"Mrs. Kirby," then said Compton, bending low over her hand in the Continental fashion, "a great artist is lost in you! I am dumbfounded: I did not believe such a thing possible!"

"Madame," said Elton in his ponderous senatorial manner, "I have never in the whole course of my life been so impressed!"

"Minnie!" cried Mrs. Compton, for the first time using her given name, "*How* did you ever do it? How did you ever *dream* of it?"

The obvious sincerity lifted Minnie as though on wings. These, in her mind, were the opinions that counted.

"It's a magic wand! a magic wand!" she cried gaily.

People were coming in increasing numbers. They walked rather aimlessly about. They were stunned. Most of them were more impressed by the individual effects and how they had

been obtained—how the moon was worked; where the water of the brook went to; whether the glimpsed blue night sky was an effect of lighting simply, or whether illumination was thrown through blue materials. The stupendous cost could not fail to obtrude itself. The details were too astonishing to permit of ensemble. They were almost oppressive.

II

The music suddenly stopped. With the precision of careful rehearsal the Robin Hood servants gathered at one end of the forest and, their long bows held horizontally across their bodies, advanced down the length of the room. The guests, laughing and wondering, were by this device respectfully but firmly driven back to stand in a group at the entrance. The servants then drew one side.

Slowly the moonlight faded in the woodland until it was almost dark. Only the side hill and the misty tumbling waters remained in radiance. And slowly, too, another whiter radiance grew, concentrated on the little pool below the falls, until the flowers about its border and the grasses and the near-by tree trunks were as though cut clear from some flat substance of dreams. An expectant hush fell.

Then from back in the depths of shadows a strong and beautiful voice began beautifully to declaim; and with the first words the more observant caught a slight stir among the bushes at the top of the slope. A head appeared, with slanting eyes and long pointed ears; a bronzed naked torso followed. There stepped down the slope furtively a strange wild figure, half man, half goat, with hairy legs. It knelt at the border of the little pool.

“He tore out a reed, the great God Pan,
From the deep cool bed of the river:
The limpid water turbidly ran,
And the broken lilies a-dying lay,
And the dragon fly had fled away
Ere he brought it out of the river.”

In pantomime the actor by the pool's edge followed the words of the actor in the shadows, lifting the reeds, fashioning them deftly into pipes, at last raising them to his lips.

"Then dropping his mouth to a hole in the reed,
He blew in power by the river."

The soft note of a flute, exquisitely played, wove its silver wire in and out among the words, rising and falling in a sweet simple wandering melody.

"Sweet, sweet, sweet, O Pan!
Piercing sweet by the river!
Blinding sweet, O great God Pan!
The sun on the hill forgot to die,
And the lilies revived, and the dragon fly
Came back to dream on the river."

To its full height stood the figure of the god, head back, the pipes uptilted. The golden voice and the silver melody went weaving their spell.

"The true gods sigh for the cost and pain—
For the reed which grows never more again
As a reed with reeds in the river."

As the last words were spoken, Pan startlingly hurled his pipes from him, and with loud wild cries of laughter splashed recklessly off down the stream and disappeared. From the blackness of the shadows came a last wild *Ho! Ho! Ho!* Then silence.

Before the spectators could catch their breath, could move from their tracks, one side of the forest opened as though by magic. A brilliant light streamed through, and the full crash of a waltz from the orchestra in the ballroom beyond.

III

With an excellent feeling for contrast Minnie had made no attempt to decorate the immense double salon which was to serve as the ballroom. The orchestra at one end was conventionally and only partially screened by plants. Chairs lined the walls. The floor was like glass. Otherwise, from the unusual festal point of view of Little Falls, nothing in the way of smilax, potted palms, or other cute little tricks had been allowed extraneous to the dignified and impressive architectural lines.

Minnie left her long-held post near the entrance. She was

excited by the comment, but her enjoyment was heavily weighted by the responsibility of the thing and by her passionate desire herself to rise to the full height of the occasion. Something pretty big had been created, and a pretty big attitude of mind was required to fit it.

Freeman drifted across her field of vision. For some reason, for the first time, she saw him with a sudden clarity. He was tawdry! She wrenched her mind away from the thought with horror; but it returned from time to time as a faint relief that the morrow would see his departure. She savagely subdued the thought. Other memories came to take its place. It occurred to her that there was not as much spontaneity as there should be, that people were a little stage-struck, as it were. She recovered herself sharply. Absurd! She felt that way because it was her party: she was too responsible. She must herself be gayer. Everybody was having a good time of course—except herself! Even Fred, off there in the corner laughing with some men!

Nevertheless, she excused herself from her partner for a moment to deliver orders; and shortly servants appeared with trays of drinks. Ah! that was better! Some of the younger couples were singing the popular airs they danced to. Bless them! Usually she froze that Perkins boy as too fresh to keep, and the flip little fluff of a Matthews girl gave her the fan-tods; but her heart warmed to them now. People were loosening up a bit.

But she felt curiously gone, and terribly lonesome amid all the compliments showered upon her. She caught a glimpse of her face in the mirror, and it appeared anxious. Probably she needed food.

Nevertheless, Minnie was wrong. Things were in fact going well. Each of those present was rising in his own fashion above the first overwhelming degrading thought of the mere production of the thing, and was striving to be appropriately exotic minded. And they were succeeding pretty well.

IV

A signal was given and an announcement made of supper. The company trooped across to the left wing of the house where the music room and the dining room had been thrown together. Here Minnie, having interposed the undecorated plainness of the ballroom, had again turned her imagination loose.

There were miles, it seemed, of narrow table laid about three

sides of the room and covered with light green silk tablecloths laid over padding. At intervals stood high vase-like compotes of fruit, connected one with the other by gracefully down-looping garlands so that the effect was of the repeated pattern of a classic frieze. Concealed small spotlights overhead threw each individual compote into brilliant relief leaving the spaces between them in a more subdued penumbra. Within this classic framework, as it were, all was tropical. Tall iron braziers glowed at spaced intervals. Negro servants in gorgeous costumes that were as readily assignable to one warm climate as another helped the guest to the food of his choice. The only really identifiable detail was the *leis* that each wore around his shoulders. The guests also had *leis*, given them at the door as they entered. An Hawaiian orchestra—then a complete novelty—slid up and down keyboards and wailed sentimentally, half-concealed among the bananas. Here again was soft blue moonlight in pure and cold contrast to the red glow of the braziers and the moving gorgeousness of the servitors.

"Gad!" cried Compton, shaken from his pose in spite of himself. "More than oriental magnificence! Back to the dear old tropics!"

"The supper table might well be an altar to the gods," Senator Elton told Minnie in his weightily gallant manner, "with all the offerings of the earth to choose from."

"There's so much to choose from that I can't look at anything," murmured Mrs. Compton aside to her partner, on overhearing this.

Even Camilla, who with Minnie had alone of those present seen a little of the preparations, was completely awed. She knew something of the labour involved in the handiwork on that salad yonder!

The supper was gay. The atmosphere had at last been established. It ought to have been: Little Falls in all its sober life had never drunk so much champagne before. It was a bit doubtful on that point—the censorious gossip of to-morrow stirred uneasily—but just now it simply did not care. It felt itself lifted to the level of familiar ease in palaces and more than oriental magnificence, and that was something exhilaratingly worth while.

It was the gray of dawn before the last of the guests took a gushing leave. To judge by their parting remarks there could be no manner of doubt that it had been a great party, a memorably

epoch-making party. It was most lavishly bedecked with terms. The house guests retired. Minnie, suddenly overcome with a tremendous weariness, crept to bed.

V

Minnie was sitting up in bed, sipping her coffee, and glancing over the two local papers. Murders that morning were nothing to them. The party usurped most of the front pages. Both called it her "masterpiece." One phrase she, with her usual flair for the striking, liked very much—the reporter called the affair "an inspired theme of hospitality."

Then suddenly she threw them from her in a burst of reaction. Camilla, entering shortly on summons, found her ecstasies misplaced. Minnie refused to talk about it.

"I feel as a general must after a battle," she said wearily.

A great and beautiful bubble had been blown to burst.

CHAPTER XLVI

I

NOW at last the preliminaries would seem to have been completed and the Kirbys ready to go ahead with their new life. Each in his fashion proceeded to do so, and to enjoy or suffer satisfactions or their opposite in reaction. But this must be noted before the period of preparation can be dismissed; that none of the three was quite the same person, nor did he occupy quite the same position in regard to the rest of mankind as in the simpler days.

Fred was the only one of the three who regretted this; but, then, he was one of your backward-looking sentimentalists who wear old clothes, and cherish ridiculous keepsakes, and generally accumulate symbolic rubbish, both animate and inanimate, which they hate to give up. He had liked his old easy relations with his fellow humans. For a great variety of reasons connected with his wealth and the pressure of it and the lack of time consequent on its constant demands, these seemed to be more or less impossible. They were displaced by a complex of other attitudes—respect, fear, deprecation, deference, and the like—that seemed to interpose a film of insulation.

Minnie was perfectly aware of this film, and did not mind it in the least. The party had quite definitely established the dividing line between herself and the rest of the community. Heretofore she had been intimately one of them, like in fibre. She had been a leader before, to be sure, but it was by recognition of her peers. Now the position was hers by right. The party had definitely set her in a class apart simply because in it she had shown force and accomplishment and artistic power admittedly beyond the scope of the others. Henceforth she spoke with authority. The mere fact that some resented this authority, even that some defied it, merely established and defined it. It was evidently up to her to use it in the most effective manner. Minnie looked about her to see what she could accomplish.

II

But perhaps the most immediately radical change was worked in Zozo. The presentation of the car on his birthday marked his climacteric. With its acquisition went glimmering the last faint chance that he might be as others are.

He received the car and the admonitions that accompanied it with as near exuberance as his inhibited nature permitted. From that moment it became his one great interest in life. Time spent away from it was in his eyes time to be killed.

At first, after a few trial runs, he was more in the garage than on the road, tinkering, oiling, polishing, making little experimental adjustments, searching down and eliminating tiny rattles or squeaks that nobody but a worshipful owner could ever have heard at all. Zozo, the instruction book, and a kit of spanner wrenches moved in company from point to point on the Pope-Hartford. Fred was much amused and Minnie a little uneasy.

"He *lives* in those overalls, and his fingernails are a sight," she complained.

Minnie had in her mind's eye an ideal picture of the young aristocrat sauntering languidly from the dimness of the entrance way, drawing his gauntlets on his lily-white hands, to take his place in the roadster from whose seat Thornton lightly sprang.

"It's a good thing he has such a practical interest," replied Fred. "I like to see the boy so thorough. He'll get over it more or less after he has done it all a few times."

"I suppose so," sighed Minnie, "but I do wish he'd hurry up and do it."

To Zozo, Fred was facetious.

"What's the matter, youngster?" he enquired after watching in silence from the doorway Zozo's oleaginous activities. "Did they saw off a defective car on us? If so, I'll send her back and make a kick."

Zozo looked up, bewilderment registering through the smear of grease across his face.

"Seems to me," Fred explained himself solemnly, "that it takes you about four hours' hard work to make her go an hour. That don't seem to me right with a brand-new car."

Zozo, alarmed, laid down his spanner and approached the better to grapple with this serious misconception. Then he caught the twinkle in his father's eye.

"Aw, rats!" he dismissed the persiflage elegantly, and turned back to important matters.

III

When the car had been groomed to his satisfaction Zozo would shed his overalls and slip into the driver's seat. He allowed Thornton to crank: that was a mere mechanical detail. At the second or third turn the great engine began its velvet purr, which rumbled hollowly against the concrete floor of the garage. Zozo touched the throttle experimentally once or twice. The motor responded with a series of gatling-gun explosions that fell instantly again to the velvet purr. Zozo rarely drove without his muffler cut out. He liked to hear her shoot, he explained vaguely. In reality the instant audible response to the slight movement of his foot gave him a feeling of unity with the leashed power under the hood that he could not have explained. All was ready. He slid in the clutch.

With a shattering roar the roadster glided out into the driveway, gathering speed on low gear. Again the racket lulled and picked up again as he went into second. Finally the loud explosions fell into the beat of a rhythm. Zozo was off. He crouched low in his seat, peering through the spokes of his steering wheel at the road ahead, a still, solid, almost inert figure amid all this clamour of exulting power. His face was expressionless, his eyes sleepy under the long visor of his cap. One would have said that he was hypnotized, almost unaware of his surroundings.

Yet for all that he was alert, quick to see, quick to judge and act. His apparent torpor was his complete blending with the manifestation of force under his control. He was the brain of this composite body that tore along the road. Its strength was in some mystic way his strength; its members were his members just as were his hands and feet; he willed and it obeyed his will; almost, it seemed to him, without the intervention of physical means. He and it were one.

Crouched over his wheel he entered a sort of half-mystic state wherein the tight walls of inhibition fell away from him. Here he found an outlet through the barriers that had been built up about him. Here the spirit that Cousin Jim had touched to life spread its crumpled wings. Here the awkwardnesses, the diffidences, the uncertainties that fretted his existence fell from him and were carried back by the rush of wind. Here he, whose

every movement, almost whose every thought had been determined for him, was in complete command. Here the restless, seeking, pent-up desire for control of the abandon of force within him found its satisfaction. His spirit, freed, sped with exultation, outriding the speed of the car, making harmony with the rhythm of his engine. No road was long enough or straight enough to satisfy the passion in him for a freedom denied and stunted from his earliest years. Behind the wheel he was happy; behind the wheel he came into possession of a magic outlet for the tormenting restlessness within.

He was almost oblivious of his surroundings, except the flow of the road. Things flashed by him; things appeared and were avoided; things threatened and were averted. Zozo made the necessary movements to this end fairly without conscious recognition, as a man deep in thought makes his way through a crowd. The booming pulse of the engine lowered momentarily as a bird folds its wings to swoop; a brake squealed for an instant; a tire skidded ever so slightly. With a twist of a sure wrist the wheel swung over and back. Again the booming pulse of the engine took up its mighty beat: down the road shot the great car in a cloud of dust, leaving a neatly avoided but badly scared obstacle, of whose existence Zozo was but dimly aware, gazing after the disappearing menace in impotent rage.

Zozo's only companion was Bunk-the-dog, now an elderly person but with a perennially frivolous mind. He sat in the other seat and extended his head, and pointed his nose straight into the rushing wind, and he too entered a great void where was only a mystical rhythmical Unity hurtling through space. Zozo wanted no other companion: no other could have accompanied him where his outflung spirit hung poised.

The public manifestation of this otherwise salutary spiritual hygiene was, however, unfortunate. Zozo drove with enormous skill, to be sure, but certainly with no consideration. He knew to an absolute mathematical certainty that he was going to miss the Prominent Citizen with at least three inches to spare; but the Prominent Citizen did not know it, and persisted in believing that he had had a criminally narrow escape. About half the population of Little Falls held firmly that daily massacre had been averted only because Providence had dropped all other affairs to watch over the performances of that fool boy. Some day Providence's attention would wander——

In addition Zozo always started his car by racing the engine with the muffler wide open. He invariably came to a spectacular breath-taking bronco-buster stop, his brakes squealing. He roared around corners in a series of gatling-gun explosions. In his wake he left a venomous populace. There was something exasperatingly indifferent and arrogant-looking in the square solidity of his figure set low in the seat of the immense roadster.

IV

Nevertheless, Zozo was not always on the rampage. At times, when the mood struck him, he would creep along for extended periods at six or eight miles an hour, the engine humming softly like a domestic cat. His whole being was in this velvet purr, concentrated on the pleasure of its uninterrupted slow rhythm, on the smooth flow of power that would pull her along on high without a skip or a jerk or a hesitation at this incredibly low rate of speed. The Mercedes could not do it.

One day as he was thus creeping along close to the curb on a side street he was hailed from the sidewalk. His first impulse was to step on her, but it was too late.

"Hullo, Cousin Jim," he muttered reluctantly, and brought the car to a stop.

"That's a pretty good-looking car, Zozo," remarked Cousin Jim.

Without further preliminary he reached over, removed Bunk-the-dog to the floor, and settled himself on the seat.

"I've never been out in her," said he. "Do you realize that, young man?"

Zozo was none too pleased. He gave her the gun and she leapt away with her usual tumultuary scatteration of all the tranquillities. They shot down the street, around a corner, roared out into the open country.

It is probable that the intention of scaring Cousin Jim out of a year's growth was no part of Zozo's conscious intention. The situation was uncomfortable, not because Zozo did not like Cousin Jim, but simply because the car was Zozo's only refuge of solitary contact with the big realities and it had been invaded. His instinct was to get away from uncomfortable situations, and Zozo's only interpretation of that instinct was speed. But after a bit the wicked thought was born that Cousin Jim had invited himself, and if he didn't like it he had only himself to blame.

Zozo laid himself out, consciously, to do a bit of driving. Cousin Jim was treated to an experience that would have scared almost anybody out of that year's growth, especially if, like Cousin Jim, he had never been in a motor car before.

But if Cousin Jim was scared he did not show it by so much as the flicker of an eye. Calmly he sat and looked about him. When at last the car came to an abrupt stop before his own door he descended with deliberation. Zozo hunched down in expectation of the customary admonition and warning.

"Thanks, Zozo," was Cousin Jim's only remark. "She certainly can go. Will you come around and give me another ride some afternoon?"

"Sure," muttered Zozo.

Cousin Jim looked after him thoughtfully, then shook himself slightly and entered the house.

"Gosh," he observed to the setter who hopped off the sofa to greet him, "I'm no drinking man, but——"

He opened a cupboard in the bookshelves and drew therefrom a bottle.

"I wonder if he will!" he said to the glass in his hand. "I wonder."

He drank. Nobody had ever thought of Cousin Jim as a hero.

CHAPTER XLVII

I

ELEMENTARY philosophical idea: except in cases of absolute stagnation each human life must have an inlet and an outlet, and must use them both in proportion. When a lot of new inlets open up, then one has to discover more outlets, or else he gets stuffed up with nerve tension or fatty degeneration of the intellect, or some other form of poisonous constipation. It's our instinct. The discovery of such outlets is in itself a relief; but true satisfaction with the situation comes only when there is also a central idea or direction.

Minnie at the present sought new outlets, with the naïve idea that doing things was a worthy object in itself; and so the more things you did the better off you were.

The first outlet that fell under her eye was amateur theatricals, simply because the palace boasted of a well-appointed stage at one end of the music room. Southworth had chinked that in as costing not much more than an ordinary concert platform.

"But I think there's nothing more deadly than amateur theatricals," Minnie had protested. "I don't want to be in a position of aiding and abetting the things!"

"Nor would I have you," laughed Southworth. "But there is no expanding element that lifts the taste above provincialism more potent than artistic expression. Of any sort. But the easiest form to get coöperation in is undoubtedly the theatre. I do not mean what you call amateur theatricals: I mean an intelligent, earnest effort at actual '*expression*.'"

Minnie thought of this now, especially the phrase about "lifting the taste above provincialism." She realized all of a sudden that if the palace, and its sophisticated activities, was to carry due weight and gain due appreciation, it must have not only a worshipful but a properly educated audience. It took taste to appreciate taste. A good many of this audience could be imported,

of course: but some must be home-grown. It was up to Minnie to grow them. She selected some of the most likely seedlings and had them in for tea.

The idea of a Drama Club was acclaimed. The idea of a Club for the Propagation of Angle Worms would have been equally acclaimed, provided the rich loam for the propagation had been located in the palace grounds. Minnie gave them quite a talk on the drama and its expanding influence and artistic possibilities.

"So I suggest we go in not for a number of the usual silly, half-rehearsed playlets, but that we concentrate on one serious effort, properly considered and properly rehearsed," she concluded. "That means giving up time to it, and putting in a great deal of good hard *work*. But I really do feel that the results will be worth while."

They murmured their applause. Minnie smiled brightly.

"To do it perfectly we should engage a professional director," she went on. "I am going to ask you to let that be my contribution, that and the stage, of course."

Nobody objected. It was most generous of her. They murmured to each other and fluttered until Minnie raised her hand in signal that the formal part was not yet over.

"This is going to be professional hard work, I want to warn you again. If we get a professional we cannot afford to waste his time. We are enlisting in a good cause. Now I suggest that all those who wish to belong to the Drama Club register their names with Miss Stearns. We will have two classes of members, Supporting and Working. Indicate to which class you wish to belong. Supporting Members guarantee to take six tickets to each performance. Working Members will comprise those who will work. That may mean acting, or again it may mean scene shifting, for all I know. So be careful!"

They all laughed with her. The formality as a meeting was at an end. Impressive tea was carried and trundled in. Camilla was busy with the registrations. Minnie, bombarded with questions, was in high feather over the enthusiasm the project had aroused. No, she did not know what play they should produce; they must consider that. (She had already made up her mind.) The casting would be done *entirely* by the Director: he would select what types he wanted, she supposed. Of course the Club must decide about the price of the tickets: the place would seat

about three hundred—would five dollars be too much? The proceeds might go to charity.

II

The Director, when he came in answer to Minnie's call, proved to be a very tall, very slender, dark-haired, and very earnest youth in spectacles with round glittering toric lenses. He was entirely absorbed in his Art, and entirely sure of his own judgment. For the suppression of mutiny and the interior maintenance of prestige his arsenal was furnished with formidable technical phrases and stage slang. The heavy guns for smoke screens and national salutes were charged with erudite ratiocinations on the Power of the Drama. Reserve ammunition of this sort was limitless. He directed in his shirt sleeves and on stage he called everybody curtly by their last names, without prefix. This was delightfully professional.

They chose "Ghosts," of course. Brunner, the Director, announced the cast after several try-outs—and with deference to private information from Minnie which appeared to trace some connection between dramatic ability and social prominence. As he seemed to consider it necessary that most of the parts should be understudied, and as he—or Minnie—possessed considerable insight as to just who would be satisfied simply to stand and wait—or move scenery—about all the Working Members were provided with jobs. Most of the Supporting Members attended the rehearsals. It was interesting and instructive; it was also comforting and pleasing—especially when the rehearsals were over and the tea wagons trundled in.

III

They gave the performance in the Christmas holidays. The music room held that evening nearly four hundred people. The audience could easily have been doubled had the accommodations permitted. Indeed, there were shrieks of distress from many of the elect who had not realized the necessity of advance booking. There could be no doubt that the *News* had not exaggerated when it stated that a "glittering and fashionable throng of Little Falls élite" was present.

And the performance was, on the whole, rather more than creditable. The acting was well above the average amateur thing, as far as acting-interpretation went, thanks to the well-

disciplined rehearsals and Brunner. The stage sets, the pictures, the colour effects, and the lighting were exquisitely beautiful. There could be no question that the thing "got over." The surerest gauge of that was that after the first five minutes the kindly disposed audience recovered from the customary gingerly feeling of skating on thin ice and settled back comfortably into its chairs. Behind the scenes the exultation mounted to great emotional heights. People kissed each other, and chattered febrilely, and forgot feelings rasped raw by small irritations. The play ended in wild applause and curtain calls and flowers.

"My dear, you were *every bit* as good as any professional I ever saw!" was a comment heard over and over again. The same remark has often been made to and of amateur boxers, but in the latter case the squared circle has too often demonstrated the fallacy.

It was also agreed that it was unthinkable that so much hard work and merit should be expended on but one performance. Minnie was surrounded by people beseeching her to stage a repetition—at the Globe Theatre, where the general public could enjoy the treat. She fended them off laughingly—let her catch her breath! she cried. Minnie was very fetching in a simple overall costume of blue checked gingham. She had not taken part in the acting, but had been invaluable behind the scenes, serving as assistant costumer, make-up artist, stage manager—whatever happened to need her strong direction. The costume was a symbol of her duty. To the men it looked like the \$4.98 things in the window of Hendersons, and its fetching charm was ascribed to starch and Minnie's person. This idea, later expressed in the bosom of their families, caused vexation. The women only too clearly recognized in its cut and fit the hand of an artist.

The doors rolled back. Refreshments were served to the whole audience. Including champagne! It was a performance *de luxe*.—Yes, there were reporters present.

IV

"Ghosts" was repeated in the Globe Theatre, but Minnie had nothing and Brunner little to do with it. They were already busy with planning the casts and scenery for three Russian one-act plays. Russian plays were then a complete novelty, and it was felt that this would knock 'em deader than they had been knocked for a long time. At no time in the action of any one of them was

there light enough on the stage to distinguish clearly whether the murder of the moment was being done with poison, knife, or hempen cord. No gleam of hope had been permitted to dilute their sombre anhedonia. There were very few sane survivors. Both Minnie and Brunner considered them "a strong vehicle."

This production was in February. Little Falls as a whole (meaning that important fraction affiliated by membership or purchase with the Drama Club) tried valiantly to rise to it. The effort was worth while, for nearly everyone felt that to do so was to become "cultivated" in One (comparatively) Easy Lesson, and not to do so was to blazon oneself as a Boob. There were a few irreverent roughnecks, masculine without exception, who exchanged secretly reprehensible ribaldry over the brimming flagons later provided.

"What time do they close the morgue, doc?" asked old Atkins of Doctor Martin, the then president of the Board of Health. "Thought I'd drop in for a few minutes on my way home and get cheered up," he explained to the surprised official.

Fred was frankly bewildered by it. Didn't seem to *get* anywhere. Then he overheard Mattie Trafford gushing to Minnie.

"Where *did* you discover those delightful plays?" she was screaming across the hubbub. "They're the most *artistic* things!"

"Artistic," were they? That explained it.

v

One more production at Easter, this time an ambitiously spectacular pantomime, with a Pierrot and a Columbine, and a rose-covered garden wall, and moonlight, and carefully studied "compositions," and a bewildering series of scene shifts and costume changes, gave every Working Member of the Club a part, and so finished the season with a glow of satisfaction. The thing was deeply and subtly symbolical—one of those symbolisms you can *almost* catch and which leaves you with a vague feeling of having been much elevated in some way.

At the ensuing party the club gave Minnie a loving cup, and Brunner a gold cigarette case, and there were speeches, especially by Brunner, who told them about the uplifting power of the drama. Everybody told Minnie what wonderful things she had done for the community, and how much uplifted they all felt. The Working Members, in their costumes and paint, circulated as proudly as second lieutenants in a hotel lobby. All was fervour

and glow and congratulation; and the Members told each other and everybody else that they really felt they had done something constructive, had introduced a new and permanent element into the æsthetic life of Little Falls, an institution that would go on growing in scope and power until it expressed something individual and abiding.

On which high note, and with a parting bumper of Minnie's inexhaustible champagne, they parted. There was one more meeting: a small business meeting. Camilla had statistics. It seemed that the Associated Charities need not yet cease their efforts. After all the bills had been paid there remained the sum of sixteen dollars and twenty cents. However, it was considered a triumph that they had played even. The artistic contribution was the thing.

Next year——

CHAPTER XLVIII

I

LITTLE Falls in its social development and expectancy was still in the age of childhood. A child, or a very simple person, expects repetition of experience and is disappointed when it finds that no experience can ever be exactly repeated. It is probably the instinct for permanence. Simple people and children are your true conservatives.

The Kirbys went away for the hot summer months. That is, Minnie and Zozo and appropriate retainers went away. Fred ran down to join them occasionally for a few days, but he seemed to feel his presence indispensable to his tiresome business. During their absence social life sagged back more or less to its old simple lines. Not entirely. There were feminines of spirit in Little Falls. They might not be able to emulate the Kirbys in lavishness, but they could certainly prove that they were not hopelessly provincial. Life speeded up a notch or so on the throttle.

But Little Falls honestly did look forward with anticipation to the coming season of the Drama Club. It honestly had taken to heart the Cultural Centre idea. It had as yet a simple unperverted appetite that got hungry for the dishes it had been taught to like.

Therefore, it was more than a little nonplussed when Minnie, returning fresh from mysterious Eastern triumphs, proved to be only mildly responsive to what was expected of her. She did not exactly turn down the plan of repeating last winter's activities, but she did not take hold. Only part of her attention seemed given to the idea, and she made no offer of personal participation. It appeared that she had become deeply interested in pottery. As soon as she had managed to veer the conversation to ceramics she woke up.

She had found the most wonderful man!

II

Ceramics flourished for some time. It was becoming to put on enveloping overall things and sit at a wheel; it was fascinating to find that when the wheel was whirled, and one pressed an implement against a lump of clay, a circular sort of thing resulted. In time one could even make receptacles that could be used for kitchen salt or flowers or matches or something. A few of the most clever triumphantly turned out simple vases in copy of a definite design. These were considered to be geniuses, however, and the common run did not aspire so high, as yet. Minnie had caused a gas-fed kiln to be erected, and the subject of firing and glazing was gone into quite extensively. Every once in a while two or three of the treasures confided to it did not crack or split or slump, and came out intact and strong. The fortunate possessor was quite puffed up, and took them home with the dazed incredulity of a creator *malgré lui*. Some quite beautiful glazes were accomplished, mostly on shards, again to the surprise of the perpetrator.

"But I thought it was going to be *blue!*" cried Kitty Caldwell.

Von Heusen, the most wonderful man, explained that most of the finest glazes had been accidental. That is what made them the unique jewels they were. Only the commonplace was repeatable at will: that was why it was commonplace. With which neat and saving bit of sophistry he passed on to the next.

But though the output was perhaps mouse-like when one looked upon the mountainous kiln, the feminines who had had the luck to be included in this demonstration did learn something of pottery. They got so they could tell a Ming from a Satsuma, and they acquired an embarrassing habit of turning dinner plates over to look at the trade-marks. At least it was embarrassing to most people. Only those possessed of unimpeachable Sèvres or Majolica, and Old Lady Watkins were unmoved.

"You need not look, my dear," the latter caught out one of the ceramists, to the latter's confusion, "I can tell you: it's early Siegel-Cooper."

This fad lasted for some time. But when the novelty of being able actually to create things that one could buy in the stores had worn off, the fussinesses began to eat into patience. Such a trifling mistake or omission could make things go wrong. And, to tell the truth, the ménages of Little Falls were quite fully

stocked with small decorative pots and jars, with brown glazed kitchen receptacles for salt or sugar or spices, with tall and wobbly vases guaranteed to tip over at a harsh look. Minnie only joined the class at the rarest intervals now. She had not lost interest in the slightest, she gave them to understand, but it just happened that at this moment she was crowded with a rush of so many things that she could not quite get around to it. A little later, when things had eased up——

Left thus without a leader the group rapidly disintegrated. A few earnest souls hung on for a time. The thing was not admittedly abandoned. Everybody assured everybody else that they were going to do wonders in that vague future "when they got time." They never did.

III

Minnie entertained a good deal, and was entertained a good deal. In that entertainment she experienced her first uneasiness—a stronger word could hardly be used. Even her clever mind, however, did not recognize its cause, nor even its existence. It was a purely subconscious influence. The origin of it was this:

No more did she attend old-fashioned informal dinners; no more were she and Fred asked just to drop in for the evening, and don't bother to dress; no more was there any last-minute telephoning to find out if they would complete a table at bridge. The rest of Little Falls did these things still; but when the Kirbys were to be asked it was felt that there must be an effort to make it worth their while; and the effort was made. In a word, they received more attention, but less friendliness. Fred felt this more than did Minnie. He was naturally a friendly person. But he, even less than Minnie, understood what had caused his feeling.

There were so many covers of life to embroider! Instead of being forced by circumstance to take what she could, Minnie had the whole wide world freely to choose from! And the world, as Stevenson said, was so full of a number of things! I have forgotten what new outlet occupied her attention next: I think it was bookbinding, or perhaps the study of history—it does not matter. But everywhere that Minnie went the lambs were sure to go. Necessarily she had to manage a little. Nobody should object to that; indeed in ordinary commonsense they all ought to be very grateful that she was spending herself—and her money and her time—to bring all this opportunity to them. And in fact as yet

she had no reason to believe that they were not grateful. In her eager, almost childlike exuberance it would never have occurred to her that people should say or think anything unkind.

But Little Falls was, here and there, and in the persons of a few independent spirits, beginning to recover its breath. A slight, very slight, wind of irreverence was beginning to blow. It was not an ill-humoured irreverence, but Minnie would have been as hurt as a slapped child could she have known that by some ribald spirits she had been nicknamed the Empress. She was not intentionally arbitrary, but she was so much busier than the common run of people without her responsibilities. Her interests were wider, her time more crowded. If she was to do all these things she must get them *done*, and the only way to accomplish that was to tell people what to do. After all, was it not reasonable? Why should not people who had more leisure give way a little?

To tell the truth they did; and, on the whole, good-naturedly. But some of them did poke a little fun. And occasionally somebody felt exasperated. For example: the palace seemed always to harbour a house guest or so, generally distinguished. Minnie liked to have a tableful at dinner—not dinner parties—just outside people, like presidential lunch times at the White House. Often those to whom she telephoned at the last moment would protest that they were themselves giving a formal dinner party that evening.

But Minnie would not listen.

"Bring them all over here: have your party at my house," she commanded, with complete assurance. They grumbled, sometimes, but somehow they felt helpless, and they obeyed orders.

On the same principle of conserving valuable minutes, Minnie never answered her telephone. Camilla took the message when possible, or summoned Minnie after carefully ascertaining not only the exact identity of the person speaking, but the purport of the business. In like manner Minnie never called any one up herself. Camilla was instructed to get So-and-So on the wire.

"Is this Mrs. Post?" Camilla would inquire. "Please hold the line; Mrs. Kirby wishes to speak to you."

And Mrs. Post would hold the line for sometimes as long as five minutes until Mrs. Kirby was able to take the receiver.

Old Lady Watkins waited thus one day. When Minnie's voice at last was heard in apology the doughty old dowager returned in a frigid voice:

"This is not Mrs. Watkins; this is Mrs. Watkins's maid. I will call her."

Whereupon the old lady laid down the receiver and glared at the instrument until she thought a suitable time had elapsed.

But such rebellions were few. Nobody below the rank of Old Lady Watkins could have got away with it. It was farthest from Minnie's thought to punish people because they would not do as she told them, but the result was the same. If they did not understand, or if their sensitive natures required too elaborate handling, she simply dropped them; not because consciously she felt herself, as a person, too important, but simply because she had not time for such frills. Thus she tended to surround herself with those who agreed with her, who obeyed promptly, who fell in with her views; and to repel the other sort.

She was fully satisfied with herself at this time as having solved her problem of balanced effectiveness.

This, it can be seen, was much the same attitude, and for the same reason, that Fred had taken in his business. It is generally interpreted as the arrogance of wealth. As a matter of fact it is only bad judgment as to what constitutes the essentials of life. There are arrogant rich, just as there are arrogant poor—people whose principal actuation is contempt and scorn. But they are the exceptions.

CHAPTER XLIX

I

FRED, groping for the reason why he was none too happy in his new job, thought he had found it in the idea that he was "too much absorbed in business."

Therefore the committee on the Soldiers' and Sailors' Memorial had from him a gracious reception. The spokesman of the committee was our old statistical friend, Quinn, still secretary of the Chamber of Commerce. Somehow he was approaching his present task with a trepidation he had not experienced even in his historic interviews with old Mr. Ezekiel Kirby. Fred was personally less formidable; but possessing the same power it was felt that he was more likely to use it. Quinn was pleased at Fred's cordiality.

"Of course, we appreciate the subscription, Mr. Kirby," he ventured, "but we had dared to hope for a little further co-operation—something a little more personal."

Fred leaned back in his office chair and crossed his legs leisurely. Ordinarily he would have conducted this interview by a series of kindly but abrupt barks, disposed of the whole matter in two minutes. The somewhat dominated interviewers would then have departed, rather glad to get away. This morning was the one when he had come to the conclusion that he was "too absorbed in business."

"What exactly do you gentlemen want me to do?" he enquired.

"We hoped you might serve on the committee," suggested Quinn, encouraged.

Fred hesitated; he knew what serving on committees meant.

"It's a patriotic thing," Quinn hastened to add, "and of course as the leading citizen we thought——"

"I'll do it," decided Fred abruptly. "Send me notice of your meetings well in advance."

"I am delighted, Mr. Kirby," said Quinn, "and of course we

shall take as little of your time as possible. It is your name and experience we particularly want. The ordinary meetings of the committee need not occupy you——”

“If I serve on the committee it will not be as a figurehead,” interposed Fred.

“Better and better! I assure you, Mr. Kirby, I cannot tell you how much myself and my associates appreciate——”

“That’s all right,” Fred stopped him.

He told Minnie of this just before dinner that evening. Why he did so was a little obscure to himself. Imperceptibly his life and Minnie’s were diverging. They were thoroughly friendly, but each was absorbed in interests which touched the other little or remotely. Where their lives coincided, as in the social activities which Fred secretly found oppressive, the occasion was not propitious for close contact. Neither was as yet conscious of this. Each was too busy.

This particular piece of Fred’s news, however, interested Minnie. Instantly she appraised it as the sort of public thing that was befitting their estate; and instantly she saw an opportunity.

“I think that’s splendid!” she told Fred. “And you can see that for once such a memorial is not a horror.”

Fred’s satisfaction was short lived. The meetings nearly drove him mad. The committee was much too large for efficiency, and it comprised representatives of low-brow politics and silk-stockinged art. Its members had nothing in common but a limitless amount of time. That was the one commodity Fred was short on. He might, of course, have absented himself and let matters take their course, but that would have been against Fred’s nature. Once he took a thing up he had to finish it, or suffer a spiritual defeat.

Some of the committee were strong for a statue on a pedestal—some sort of a winged angel sort of thing supporting a dying hero while lilliputian sentinels guarded the show in a detached and impersonal manner. Another faction wanted something useful, like a drinking fountain with bas-reliefs of busted cannon and more dying heroes and sinking ships and rolls of honour about the pediment. Fred privately thought these were both good ideas, but he changed his mind. Minnie saw to that. Her taste in such matters was quite good, but she knew better than to advance the “artistic” argument with Fred.

"Of course they are both good enough ideas," she said, "the whole question is: Who is going to design them and carry them out?"

"We'll have to get a good man," said Fred vaguely.

"No good man would consent for one moment to fit his designs to old Atkins's graft."

"Atkins's graft!" cried Fred. "What in the world do you mean?"

"Well, perhaps not graft,"—Minnie receded somewhat—"but surely you're not so green that you do not see he's got the whole thing cut and dried as a job for his foundry?"

This gave Fred pause.

"It makes me almost angry when I see how you men let that old tyrant run things to suit himself," Minnie pursued her point. "I had hoped that Little Falls with you on the committee would put up something creditable and modern instead of falling in step with all the other atrocities."

Fred began to inquire around. He knew little of such affairs himself, but there were several whose opinion he respected. Bob Post had a pretty good eye for such things, and he was a practical man, too. Bob, when questioned, shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"Of course these things are a joke," said he, "and they always will be a joke as long as the decision is in the hands of people who know nothing about it and are swayed by the demands of local politics. It's like billboards and plastering the silly names of towns in concrete letters forty feet high against the eternal hills. Public sentiment hasn't grown enough. Atkins knows what he wants and he'll get it because he knows the ropes and he's got his gang and those who know better are too scattered and too busy."

Fred thought this over.

"Well, I don't know why Atkins should run things to suit himself," he submitted.

Bob Post looked at him curiously.

"You're on the committee," he said.

"That's why I asked you. I don't know much about such things."

He attended another meeting of the committee and listened to the proceedings with a new knowledge. They argued at length, and quite happily on the whole. It was evident to Fred that all but two of them were figureheads, quite innocently sure

they were doing it, and—quite as innocently—certain at the psychological moment to be manipulated by the silent two. They were put in as camouflage—like himself.

He arose to his feet. This was the first time he had injected himself into the proceedings.

"It seems to me, gentlemen," he told them, "that our main trouble is that we do not know what we want. We are all of us anxious to do things right, but we have no particular ideas on these matters. Now when in my private business I find myself in that fix, I call in an expert who does know. I move we hire the best expert in the market and then follow his prescription."

This seemed to him so eminently sensible that he was surprised at the opposition. From the two silent members he had expected it, but those two worthies were not called upon to exercise their talents. The natural imbecility of the others made that unnecessary. Each desired his name in the papers.

He left the meeting thoughtfully. A new idea was forming in his mind, a splendid idea that would solve the whole problem, and please everybody—except, perhaps, Atkins. In the corridor of the City Hall—the meetings were held in the City Hall—he ran across Sam Brady and stopped for a chat.

"How are you getting on with the Trained Seals?" enquired Sam. "Doing much business?"

"That bunch!" growled Fred, who was still smarting. "They'll never get anywhere in a thousand years."

"Usual public committee," amended Sam, "and they'll get somewhere—in time."

"Well, I, for one, haven't the time," returned Fred.

"Why do you monkey with it personally?" enquired Brady curiously. "All they want is your name, you know."

"I know that: but I got kind of interested. I suggested they call in an expert and find out, and you ought to have seen them jump my frame!"

"Sure," agreed Sam philosophically, "they would. Good chance to show how blame independent they are. But you're just up against the usual thing."

"They're crazy," growled Fred.

"Oh, no. Some of them are the kind of damn fools that shy at the word 'expert.' Some of the silk-stockings bunch are struck on ideas of their own and want to put them over. And there's a hard gang in there that intend to get a little pickings maybe

out of the contract, and to do that they've got to swing it their way."

"I've spotted them—the Atkins crowd."

"Oh, you have! They'll land the persimmon when it is ripe."

"I don't know whether they will or not," said Fred.

Sam looked at him thoughtfully.

"Going to buck Atkins, eh!" he observed.

"I may."

"I wish you joy—with that committee."

"I won't bother with the committee."

"Going to tell me?"

"Not yet, Sam. Later. This is under your hat."

"Sure," said Sam.

II

Fred went home to his office and telegraphed Southworth to come out at once. The architect went from the train directly to the office where he was at once admitted to Fred's presence. The two were closeted for nearly three hours, at the end of which time he went directly back to the station. No one but Fred and his office force knew of the visit.

From that moment Fred seemed to drop all interest in the memorial project. He ceased to attend the committee meetings, which continued to hold academic debates, and to make progress at about the speed of modern glacial action. Only observation with delicate scientific instruments could have measured the rate of progress. Minnie expostulated over this opportunity lost to artistic achievement, but Fred remained stolidly impervious to argument or persuasion. He "hadn't time"; and that settled it. Only to Sam Brady did he exhibit an impish amusement.

"How are the Mud Turtles progressing?" he would ask. That was his nickname for the committee.

So invariably did he ask this that Sam, sensitive to the hidden desires of those in power, began to inform himself. He began to see that Fred's interest was not merely sardonic.

"They've nearly finished a Preliminary Report," he replied one day.

"I don't want that report to go in yet," said Fred. "You fix it for me, will you, Sam?"

"How? I'm not on the committee."

"Throw a monkey wrench in, somehow. You can do it."

"All right," Sam agreed, after closely examining his client, for such he called Fred. "How long?"

"Two months."

"It shall be did, O great chief!"

The accomplishment was very simple. Sam enlisted Minnie to stir up the Women's Club not to object—for there was nothing as yet to object to—but to enquire. He did this indirectly, and it tickled his sense of humour.

III

Before the required two months of additional delay were up Fred received at his office a large registered package, which he opened as eagerly as if he were a boy, and this fresh from the Christmas tree. It contained a half-dozen large photographs, three careful drawings, and a number of blue prints. The drawings were elevations of a memorial done in Southworth's best style; the photographs were of exquisite sculptures already completed by one of the foremost artists in the country; the blue prints were the specifications. The conception was exquisitely beautiful.

After examining them delightedly, Fred wrapped them all up again. He had his secretary determine that Minnie was at home. Then at this unprecedentedly early hour he drove out to the palace, went directly to the den, and caused Minnie to be summoned.

She came in hastily, and a little frightened.

"What is it?" she cried. "What's happened? Zozo——?"

"Zozo is all right. I want you to look at something." He began to undo his package.

"I've some people in for bridge," she said; "they're waiting."

"Look at these," urged Fred.

She took one glance, then touched the bell.

"Ask Miss Stearns to take my hand, and present my apologies," she ordered Jean briskly. "I shall be detained for a little while. Why, Fred!" she cried, "how exquisite! How beautiful! Are these the final plans?"

"They're final as far as I am concerned," chuckled Fred, delighted at her approval.

Minnie slowly gathered the idea. This was not the committee's work: this was Fred's own unaided idea! He had done it on his own hook. She was stunned.

"The city owns the site," Fred explained. "I thought I'd just present the memorial itself sort of as my contribution to the city of my birth—that sort of thing. I don't know how it strikes you, but it seems to me——"

"It's a wonderful idea!" Minnie broke in, "it's the very thing! I'd no idea you had even thought of such a thing. And it's wonderfully artistic."

Fred looked blank for the fraction of an instant. But this was only an instinctive reaction to a word. Minnie reached for the telephone and gave a number.

"Who you calling?" he asked.

"The *News*—to send up a reporter, of course," said she.

IV

The *News* did its duty joyously. There were reproductions of Southworth's elevation sketches, showing the memorial in its setting of trees, and of the photographs of the sculptured groups. Two columns of mixed blurb lauded Fred's generosity in presenting this magnificent gift to the city of his birth; gave his biography, Southworth's biography, the sculptor's biography; described, inaccurately, the symbolism of the structure; made a guess, also inaccurate, as to the cost; pointed out that no other city in the country of the size of Little Falls possessed a sample of the distinguished sculptor's work. It added that the legal formalities of acceptance by the city would be fulfilled at the next Council Meeting, but owing to the modesty of the donor there would be no ceremony. It was all very gratifying. Fred enjoyed himself. He bought many copies to send to his friends.

Minnie, too, was pleased with him, which was an added triumph. Fred's individual inspirations had so rarely seemed to merit full approval. The only complaint she had to make was that Fred refused to make a public ceremony of it. On this point he was firm.

"Well, anyway, there'll have to be a ceremony at the dedication," Minnie concluded.

But the day before the Council meeting, Sam Brady dropped in to the office. He slipped into a seat, accepted a cigar, lighted it, and took several puffs before speaking.

"Afraid there's going to be a little trouble," he observed at length.

"Trouble?" repeated Fred.

"Yes. Council meeting to-morrow night. There seems to be quite a lot of public pressure. O'Reilly was telling me he'd been pestered to death. Came to me to know what he should do."

Fred stared at him, still unable to grasp the idea.

"Do you mean to say," he asked at last painfully, "that they don't want to accept the memorial?"

"Oh, they'll accept all right." Sam stopped to laugh shortly. "Never knew anybody yet to refuse a gift. But the row seems to be over the site in the Park. Lot of cranks claim that should be reserved for the public memorial, and all that sort of rot. Probably originates with those Mud Turtles of yours. They're sore, naturally. But you can always find a lot of damn fools to follow any movement."

Fred was turning red.

"Keep your hair on," advised Sam. "There's always plenty cranks. But I thought I'd drop in and tell you. And I want to know how you feel about it. Would you just as soon put your show somewhere else in the Park?"

Fred brought his fist down heavily on the desk.

"By God, no!" he cried, "I've taken time and attention and money to give this thing freely to this town because they had a gang of incompetent nincompoops in charge that were sure to ditch the whole thing. Now it's going right spang square where it belongs, or it doesn't go at all, and that's final. Of all the——"

"That's all right," interrupted Sam equably. "I agree with you. I just wanted to see where you stood on the subject so I'd know what to do."

"Well, that's where I stand, by God!" cried Fred. "And it better be accepted as offered or I'll break the damn thing into lime and scatter it on my lawn!"

"Oh, it'll be accepted all right," said Sam, as he rose. "So long!" and he went out.

After his departure Fred sat for some time staring at his desk. He was badly shaken; and this in spite of the fact that his commonsense kept telling him that the thing embodied merely the pique of incompetents forestalled in their inaptitude, of the envious, of the thwarted avaricious, and of the empty-headed. This was true, and to be expected, he kept telling himself; but the trouble was he had *not* expected it.

And to complete the incident, on his way home that evening he

was blocked by traffic within ten feet of a stalled street car. In the crowd clinging to the platform were two middle-aged men apparently of the better clerk or bookkeeper class. They were carrying on a conversation across the heads of two girls, and in consequence their words carried clearly.

"Well," one was saying, "I don't care myself whether they have a drinking fountain, or an ordinary fountain or just a plain statue, but what I say is that the principle of the thing is wrong. It's a public place and it hadn't ought to be possible for any rich guy to bust in and stick up what *he* wants. I'm sick of these rich guys just buying what they want. This to-hell-with-the-public stuff is getting to be a chestnut——"

The street car ground forward and Fred heard no more of it.

He drove home at a speed that would have earned for him the respect as a driver that Zozo had heretofore consistently withheld. At first he was inclined to withdraw the whole thing: his better sense saved him from that folly. But his free, happy, outflung confidence in the friendly feeling of his fellow citizens was gone. His mind understood it, but his heart did not.

v

Now it happened that Minnie, too, had had an experience the very same day, and that she had returned home a few moments after Fred had entered the big hall. She, also, had overheard a fragment of conversation not intended for her ears. Naturally, with her temperament, she was "boiling mad" where Fred was merely hurt, so he had to listen first to what she had to say.

"I was in the hall waiting for Mrs. Pine to come downstairs, where I could catch her before she went into the drawing room. I had no intention of eavesdropping, none whatever; but I couldn't help hearing what they were saying. It was that Mattie Walker: I never did like her any way. She was talking."

"Was she talking to herself?" queried Fred with a faint stirring of amusement.

"No, there were a lot more of them. I don't know who they were; I didn't *want* to know who they were. It doesn't matter: people are all alike—selfish and unjust and ungrateful."

"I suppose you're going to tell me about it," observed Fred patiently.

"I am telling you about it. Do you remember that old jade and fligree necklace I got in Milan? It is a *beautiful* thing,

and undoubtedly genuine, and it was one of those things that just seem to go with certain people. It exactly fitted Mattie: I could just see it on her every time I looked at it, and it was an exquisite antique, really priceless. The only reason I hesitated about giving it to her was because I really thought it was too expensive a present and I did not want to embarrass her."

"But I gather you did give it to her."

"Yes, I did. Last week. I couldn't *see* it on anybody but her. I wish now I'd thrown it in the Lake!"

Fred waited.

"Can you imagine what she was saying to that roomful of people, who sat there and agreed or kept silent?" cried Minnie, her colour rising again. "Somebody admired the necklace and asked when she had got it. 'Minnie Kirby gave it to me,' said she: just like that. I could almost see her toss her head in that sly way she has when she wants to be smart. Somebody said something, I don't remember just what, about its being nice of me, or something like that. 'Oh, I don't know,' said Mattie. 'It's a beautiful thing, of course; and I ought to be glad to have it. But I'm sick of these people who think that just because they have money they can walk all over you one day and then buy you back body and soul the next by giving you something expensive you don't know how to refuse.' What do you think of a speech like that? It's outrageous, after all I've done for Mattie Walker, since she was a silly girl."

"Well, what *had* you done to Mattie?" Fred asked mildly.

"Nothing, not one thing," cried Minnie vehemently. "In fact, I was thinking only to-day that I'd been more than usually patient with her tardiness and her irresponsibility, and that it was getting nearly time *someone* rounded her up and made her stop wasting other people's time. Nothing was farther from my mind than the nasty mean little motive she ascribed. I gave her that necklace because I wanted to give it to her and thought it becoming to her."

"Of course you did; I understand that," said Fred. "But you probably stepped on her some time——"

"I'm sick of such sensitive creatures," swept on Minnie, "and do you know the people she was talking to agreed with her. Not one had the courage or the strength of mind or the common *decency* to speak up! After all I've done for every one of them! It's sickening."

"Then you do know who the others were."

"I do not. And I don't want to. I shall never have Mattie Walker in these doors again. I must say it's disheartening to spend oneself as I have for the people of this community and then to get no ordinary appreciation—to be *misjudged*—in any such fashion. It's a lesson to me, though. I'm *through*! I shall not lift my hand or go one inch out of my way for any of them again."

"I guess it's just human nature," sighed Fred, "I've had a little taste of it myself."

He told her of his afternoon's experience as to the memorial. She listened with mounting indignation, her whole spirit in arms.

"I never heard of anything so atrocious!" she cried again and again.

It did them good to talk it out. They were shocked and puzzled at what they honestly thought was a revelation of a baseness in human nature their innocence had never suspected. They had been too absurdly trusting: they had learned their lesson. Henceforth they would know just how much and how little to expect. And since above all things human beings hate to feel that they have been credulous or fooled by illusion, they told each other that they would not get caught that way again!

CHAPTER L

I

THESE incidents, slight as they were intrinsically, nevertheless were of the greatest importance in that they marked another step on the path along which both Minnie and Fred were, each in a different way, moving. A hardening and a segregation; a central dissatisfaction—these were the results. An ultimate necessity for centralization or a final disaster—these were the potentialities.

In a curious fashion the important crises of life appear always to bring with them an instinct that seeks the possible antidote. It may be a mere automatic balancing of forces; but at times, and to the more fancifully inclined, it would almost seem that beneficently watchful powers offer to each his chance to take or leave.

Neither Minnie nor Fred had spared more than a fleeting thought to Cousin Jim for months. Each had been too busy in his own fashion. Yet on the very heels of the crucial incidents recorded in the preceding chapter, both were impelled to visit him.

Certainly Minnie would never have connected her impulse with any deeper need. She ascribed it to social conscience. She had neglected him, and she felt a little guilty about it. Her procrastination in the matter she had readily excused. Cousin Jim was much too leisurely a person to fit at all into the life Minnie had to lead. She could dictate a dozen letters (she had learned to dictate), make a score of decisions, issue fifty potent orders in the length of time it took him to fill his pipe and get squared away for what he called an old-fashioned visit. Minnie would have liked to do her duty by him, but he was singularly difficult. He seemed to have no conception of the importance of a schedule of engagements. He never fitted neatly into the ordered niche she would have assigned him.

But Cousin Jim had a peculiar quality of never being quite negligible. As far as could be judged he was very happy, and it never seemed to cross his mind that he was being "neglected."

She saw him occasionally, for he loved to prowling around the palace grounds all by himself, but somehow it was always when she was in transit and late. She invited him occasionally, but he never came. Yet he was on her mind. He worried her as a buzz fly would have worried her. She felt that in common decency, as a member of the family, a certain amount of attention was due. Its proffering was not only due from her; but its acceptance was due from him. She was perfectly willing to arrange matters in neat handy packages. If Cousin Jim had any decent consideration, as she called it, he would be all ready to receive the packages on the fly. He had no decent consideration; and the worst of it was that he appeared to be sublimely unconscious of even the desirability of neat packages. He divided her strongly between compassion, vexation, and an unwilling affection.

Now in this vexatious interlude of human readjustments her mind turned more strongly to him. She resolved to confer on him the enormous distinction of a personal call, and to that end she decked herself out and summoned the motor.

But as luck would have it the satisfaction of this effort was denied her. She caught sight of him smoking his pipe on the terrace by the sun dial.

Feeling inexplicably a trifle thwarted and a little vexed—though, naturally, she did not appreciate the cause—she dismissed the motor and crossed over to him.

"I was just going to make you a call," she greeted him, almost accusingly.

Cousin Jim showed no especial appreciation of the astounding quality of the compliment.

"Well, here I am," said he amiably. "Sit down and have a talk." He made room for her on the stone bench.

"Quite different from the old days, isn't it, Minnie?" he smiled, waving his pipe at the scene before them. "Why, it seems only yesterday that I hunted partridges where the swamp used to be yonder, and used to lay for a chance mallard or so by the point."

"And when I lived down under the Hill and went to market every day with a basket," Minnie tried to follow his mood.

"How does it feel to be a plutocrat, anyway?" asked Cousin Jim, stretching his long legs comfortably. "Really enjoying it? Having a good time?"

"Now, Cousin Jim." For all her good resolutions Minnie felt a trifle vexed. She rejoined a little impatiently, "Do be agreeable.

It's so banal, all this common talk of the 'idle rich' and the 'curse of wealth.' I'm sick and tired of it."

"Bless you!" cried Cousin Jim amusedly, "I wasn't going to. I have nothing against wealth. Why should I have? It's all a matter of the individual. I only wanted to know. It interests me. I, personally, would not be big enough to stand it, that's all. I'm afraid of it, as most people are afraid of a can marked dynamite. It is dangerous stuff. Often has a bad effect, though I admit it needn't have and shouldn't have. Perhaps in the majority of cases it doesn't have. But in my time I've seen an awful lot of people in the image of human beings softened to an unrecognizable gelatinous mass of indulged decomposition by it."

"Cousin Jim! I think you're disgusting!" cried Minnie.

"Well, so are they," chuckled Cousin Jim, "when you get within range of their gaseous influence. Putting money on some people is like putting salt on a slug—they dissolve." He seemed to stretch still longer in the luxury of unhurried discussion. "I am not saying this is necessary, mind you, or inevitable; far from it. Most people strike me as doing darn well, considering the danger there is in handling wealth and controlling the very real stimulus that comes from it."

He smoked a moment in silence.

"Oh, there are a surprising number that handle it. Did it ever occur to you how many immensely wealthy men there are in history who are not known as wealthy? Indeed, the average man does not even know they were wealthy."

This was better. Minnie was interested.

"Well," Cousin Jim answered her question, "there was George Washington, and Marcus Aurelius, and John Jay, and Lafayette, and Æschylus, and Michelangelo, and Raphael, and Raleigh, and Alcibiades, and Charles James Fox. I could think of a lot more, if I had time. I'll bet you never knew whether any of those fellows were rich or not—the way you think of Cræsus or Midas, or a lot of these rich fellows nowadays. And there were any amount of real important plutocrats of their time that you and everybody else have forgotten. Yet every one of them had enough to give all kinds of monkey dinners if he'd wanted to."

"Emerson," interposed Minnie with interest, "says something about 'all forward steps of the race have been inaugurated by men of means freed from the necessity of toil to cultivate their vision.' Or was it Emerson?"

"I don't know. And I'd question that 'all.' But he was right in principle. But those fellows are scarce, Minnie. The bigger the burden the bigger the man must be to carry it. That's why I'm so sorry for most of these people with money. Poor devils; they have so little opportunity for any healthy effort toward self-support."

"Why should they do anything toward self-support? They don't have to. That's the whole point!"

"So few chances to do anything for themselves, I mean; to get off the earth; to come in contact with reality, in the way people who are self-supporting do."

Minnie felt again the old sense of exasperation.

"That's so ridiculous, Cousin Jim!" she cried. "Do you mean to say that for the good of my soul I, for example, should do actual manual labour that I can pay to have done twice as well? Or if I want to send the conventional jelly to someone who is sick, it is any more good to him because I went out and made it myself? You are always so impractical from any point of view!"

She had come out for a nice chat, and as usual Cousin Jim was irritating.

"No, my dear," he denied equably. "I'm merely stupid in making my point. I wasn't talking about material self-support. By all means spend your mornings making out checks for some Jelly Distribution Society. The Society will probably reach more sufferers with less jelly than you could. But when that modern and advanced condensed milk of human kindness is satisfactorily distributed your obligations are not over."

"Go on," sighed Minnie. "I'm listening. How do I spend my afternoons? On my soul?"

"I'm trying to acquire something or other that you can't buy, something only you can get for yourself, something that ringing all the electric bells in the world won't bring to you, something that interests you and that you *want* to get and to pass along to other people. I don't give a hoot what it is, but it's got to answer those specifications."

"That's rather vague," objected Minnie.

"In the whole vast country beyond our range of vision some suitable thing must exist for each," said Cousin Jim. "Study history, or the endless variations of science. Cultivate the imagination of the world; or make people laugh. Plant trees, or make something beautiful—*make* it, don't order it made."

"I suppose you want me to go in for arts and crafts and burnt leather," derided Minnie.

"Well, that's the idea," agreed Cousin Jim unexpectedly. "Craftsmanship—that's *exactly* it! Craftsmanship of the spirit! make 'em bigger and more beautiful and jollier fellows to live with."

Minnie saw in Cousin Jim's vaguely expressed idea only a physical régime for the purpose of counteracting the softening effect of luxury.

"Listen, Cousin Jim," she urged. "Have you no respect for executive ability? Can't you see how much farther-reaching my abilities are now than if I performed details myself, instead of planning my scheme and then handing it over to competent deputies?"

Cousin Jim sighed and stretched his legs.

"I'm a dull old duffer, and I must be going," said he. "I suppose it's all right, as long as you are so completely occupied you don't notice it. It's when you begin to notice what's outside of you that you get bored with yourself."

He arose and Minnie arose with him. Cousin Jim always talked like that when he was worsted in an argument. She was exercising marvellous self-control, which lasted only until the old man had taken himself off. This was a nice time to talk such nonsense to her, just as she was getting oriented after the shock of realizing people's fundamental ingratitude and meanness of spirit. As usual, instead of helping her, he had said just the things most likely further to unsettle her. But he had also the effect of arousing her vigorous fighting spirit. Instead of mooning about the situation, she took hold of it with decision. The chance had passed her by because she was too compactly self-centred to admit it as anything but a translation in terms of herself.

After Cousin Jim had departed she hunted up Camilla in the little business office. There she was certain of agreement in whatever she had to say, and all she wanted at present was to blow off steam and to reassure herself that she was right. After a moment Camilla said, as Minnie knew she would:

"Something has vexed you, dear. What is it?"

"It really isn't anything," said Minnie with a half-laugh of annoyance. "It's just that Cousin Jim again."

"What has he been doing now?" asked Camilla sympathetically.

"Nothing; not a thing. He's just been talking again, more of his aggravating glittering generalities."

"You should not pay any attention to him," said Camilla.

"I know it. But they aggravate me, they are so silly. Somehow I can't help myself. Now take the house-warming party, for instance. Of *course* it cost a lot of money, and of *course* it was all over and done with in one night! What of it? Outside the fact that it was a creative achievement of no small merit, think of the people it gave employment to, not only those who actually constructed or served at the house, but all the others all over the world who made things."

"Was Cousin Jim objecting to the *party*?" cried Camilla. "Why?"

"No," Minnie swept on, "he didn't mention the party. I don't really remember what he *did* talk about! I never do! Only I know he always makes me uncomfortable, and I don't like it. It is *too* stupid of people to deny the advantages of wealth." (Cousin Jim had not denied them; but for the moment that was beside the point.)

She was launched, and she poured herself out to the receptive and chameleon-like Camilla. It will be remembered, away back, that one of Minnie's unacknowledged and subconscious reasons for engaging Camilla was that the latter was a good mark to talk at. She went on.

Of course one had to take advantage of the special privileges: it was only sensible, in the interests of efficiency, to do so. It did smooth out difficulties: one had only to state one's identity to quicken service, to secure what had otherwise been unattainable. But that was not a vicious thing: it saved precious time at such places as ticket offices and business houses, and enabled her to accomplish more than any other woman of her set. Everybody admitted it. She was a leader, not only in social and artistic activities, but in the serious educational movements of the day. Cousin Jim had always such an uncomfortable way of asserting his own values as the only values of importance. There was something very knowingly positive about him for one seemingly so gentle.

Then she told Camilla of what she had overheard at Mrs. Pine's, and Fred's trouble with the memorial. Camilla was satisfactorily horrified and indignant. Minnie instantly assumed a lofty attitude.

"Of course it was annoying," she said, "and I must say it surprised me after all we have done for the place and the people and in view of the fact that I've worked myself to the bone for them. But I've learned my lesson, and that's a good thing anyway. They'll whistle a long time before they get anything more out of *me*, unless it entirely suits my pleasure and convenience!"

And that was all Minnie got out of that!

II

Fred was accustomed to drive himself to and from his office or the clubs. That very afternoon he, too, perhaps led by the same blind impulse that would heal, instead of going straight home, drove around by Cousin Jim's house. And—perhaps by mere luck, perhaps because of some deeper plan of coincidence—a puncture delayed him sufficiently so that Cousin Jim was given time to arrive.

As of old custom he pushed open the front door without ceremony, Cousin Jim was seated near the window, where the light was good, spectacles perched on his nose, winding bright silk thread on the splice in a fishing-rod joint. The setter dog of the time lay on the hearth.

Fred stopped a moment in the doorway and drew a deep breath. It was as though years had slipped aside like storm clouds to show unchanged an old acquaintance. Cousin Jim suspended his winding to look at Fred over the top of his spectacles.

"Fred," said he after a moment, "you look like a concrete sidewalk split by an earthquake. Lie down on the sofa." He laid aside his rod-joint, arose, and fumbled in an obscure corner. "Here, try one of these. Oh, you needn't look so suspicious and uncomplimentary! I didn't buy them. They were given to me by a fastidious and prosperous friend."

Fred laughed a little wearily and accepted the cigar.

"Thanks, Jim," said he; "thought I'd drop in to see you."

"So I observe," remarked Cousin Jim drily, "but you do as I say and lie down on that sofa."

Fred lighted the cigar and stretched himself out with a sigh. Cousin Jim went back to the window and his rod mending. After a moment or so the setter dog jumped up to coil alongside Fred. He remembered with a little glow of familiarity: the dog always had got on the sofa at Cousin Jim's—astonishing how soothing it was just to pat a dog lying down alongside of you!

Cousin Jim finished winding the rod and began to read a book. Nobody said anything; except the clock. After a while Cousin Jim went over to the sofa, took the half-burned extinct cigar from Fred's relaxed hand and threw it in the fire. For a moment he looked down on the sleeper, contemplating his heavy breathing and nervous twitching.

"Poor chap," said Cousin Jim.

A half-hour later Fred awoke with a start, glanced at the clock, and arose, stretching. Cousin Jim looked up from his book.

"Well, got to run along," said Fred.

"Glad you came in," said Cousin Jim. "It gets sort of lonesome sitting around by yourself, and I'm tired of talking to people."

That was all. But at least in Fred's soul had been no denial or rejection.

Minnie established finally her conceptions of these things and influences in a rather astonishing exchange with a very celebrated scientist who was visiting her gardens rather than herself. Doctor Ames was sufficiently eminent to carry a certain amount of weight in whatever he said, even though his subject was only Cousin Jim.

"I've been having a most extraordinarily sociable hour of silence with that old chap, your Cousin Jim," he told her. "We hadn't much to say to each other. But somehow he gave me the feeling of having a private and particularly fascinating world of his own. He doesn't dare tell anybody about it, because nobody would believe it."

Minnie stared speechless with surprise.

"I'd like to be intimate enough with him to be let in on the secret," the Doctor continued. "He is an amplifier; and there are so many reducers in the world. I felt as if I were playing hookey from life when I talked to him—seem to sense unguessed fascinating things that I never have time for."

He had the stage and was feeling expansive and would evidently have liked to go on developing his theory of Cousin Jim. But Minnie dared cut him short almost impatiently.

"Oh, yes, he's a nice old thing," she rejoined, "—but—" It was a very eloquent "but." She was about to change the subject, but suddenly there swept over her what had become almost a typical reaction to Cousin Jim—one of those uncomfortable mo-

ments when vague discontent stirred her. What *was* there about the man that was so uncomfortable! She was compelled to down the mood with further speech. "I have no patience with graspless people," she went on. "Life is nothing more or less than you make of it with your own wits. It is a simple mathematical question of how much you want to put in it. Mooning around! Always dreaming of a world that does not exist! I don't care how ideally beautiful it is, it's not proved by the experience of human nature. Humph! Take things as you find them, I say; and mould them to suit yourself!"

The scientist looked at her queerly, and himself changed the subject.

But the little outburst strangely seemed to round out Minnie's readjustments. She felt as though she had thought something out to a reasoned and logical conclusion; as if she had at last discovered the laws of energizing. Life seemed for the moment almost absurdly simple, if one had only the wit and foresight to manipulate it. She surged on an elation of power. She intended thenceforth to manipulate it.

Danger! Danger! It is not the luxury or the power of wealth that imperils, it is the tendency to set one apart; the tendency to crust over what Cousin Jim had called the Us-ness, the tendency to harden surfaces so that the shallow reflections of what Minnie called "meanness and ingratitude" seem to be the reflection of the whole of life. That is the real danger of wealth—or of poverty, or of "saintliness," or of intellectual attainment, or of anything else that isolates. Minnie could not see that the weakness of her idea lay in the fact that it was unrelated to anything but herself.

CHAPTER LI

I

FRED returned home from the office to find Minnie indignant. He stifled a sigh. Minnie was so often indignant about something, and even when she did not expect him to do anything about it, she wanted him to listen to all the details, to share her point of view, to arouse in himself a corresponding indignation. Sometimes it seemed to him that this was the only sort of emotion they shared nowadays. They were not exactly drifting apart in the conventional sense, but they did not touch. Neither seemed to have time.

This time it was Zozo. The angel child was being unjustly picked upon.

Minnie's subconscious reasoning in regard to this public nuisance was very simple. If she could have had it psychoanalysed to the surface of her mind, she would herself have seen this. The syllogism ran as follows: her best endeavours had gone into Zozo; the results must logically be as she had visualized them; therefore criticism of Zozo was tantamount to criticism of her judgment, her methods—of herself! This was quite aside from her maternal affections, which were strong; and from her contempt for the common herd of humanity, which was growing.

To-day Zozo had carried the last straw to a burdened public. In swinging around a corner, muffler open as usual, he had nearly run over a child. With his usual quick instinctive judgment he had skilfully avoided that catastrophe, but was forced by his swerve to kill a dog. The dog was a valuable animal, and was beloved as a pet. Its owner happened to be standing by. He was frightened by the child's danger, swept by the reaction of its escape, and angered by the death of the animal. These emotions carried him to the nearest telephone. He had failed to get Fred at the office, so had called Minnie.

There was scant satisfaction to be got of that. She was instantly in arms, and the man was too angry to be diplomatic. The interview was short and belligerent.

"He said he was going to swear out a warrant for Zozo's arrest!" Minnie concluded her recital. "The impertinence!"

"What has Zozo to say?" asked Fred wearily.

Minnie's account of the affair had in fact been elaborated from Zozo. According to him he had been driving slowly, the child had appeared suddenly, he naturally had to turn out for it, and the dog had run right in the path. Called to an interview with his father, he doggedly repeated the gist of this.

"It's unfortunate, very unfortunate," said Fred. "It seems to be an unavoidable accident, but it ought to be a lesson to you that you *cannot* drive too carefully on the streets."

"I *was* driving carefully," insisted Zozo. "I dodged the kid too easy; and if it hadn't been that the confounded dog ran right *at* me, it would have been all right."

"What are you going to do about it?" demanded Minnie, when Zozo had withdrawn. "I never was talked to so outrageously in my life!"

"Well," observed Fred pacifically, "I suppose it was natural he should be excited."

"No excitement justifies an insult," stated Minnie positively. "It was outrageous! And he said in so many words he was going to have Zozo arrested."

"I don't think he'll do that," said Fred. "I'll have to see him, I suppose."

"Well, I hope you impress on him that he cannot talk to our kind of people in any such manner!" concluded Minnie.

Fred sighed. Here was another of those disagreeable extraneous matters that, piling themselves on his already burdened days, increased so gratuitously the sum of his weariness.

II

He had no difficulty in seeing the complainant. That individual was waiting in the outer office when Fred came in. With him, somewhat to his surprise and annoyance, the latter recognized Corcoran, the Chief of Police. But the official hastened to remove any misconception as to the motive behind his presence.

"I persuaded Mr. Fawcett here to come down with me and talk it over a little before he swore out a complaint," he explained when the three were alone in the inner office. "There ain't nothing to be gained by hasty action, I told him."

"I can't see that there's anything to be gained by talk, either," stated Fawcett snappily. "It's time a dangerous public nuisance was curbed, and I've made up my mind to do it."

In spite of his direct words he was evidently ill at ease and held himself rigid. However much he had told himself that he was as good as any rich man, that he cared not one snap of his fingers for Kirby's money, and all the rest of it, he was impressed in spite of himself once he found himself surrounded by the mahogany and faced by the burly bull-dog authority that had become part of Fred's official atmosphere. But as he really was a free and independent citizen this merely stiffened his obstinacy.

"I see," Fred replied to both of them. "Well, sit down: there's no use standing."

Corcoran did so at once, perching on the edge of his chair, placing his official cap carefully crown down alongside him on the floor, and depositing therein his gloves. Fawcett, after a moment's hesitation, also sat down in order not to appear ridiculous.

"Have a cigar," Fred proffered.

Corcoran took one, which he held clumsily between his thick fingers until he saw Fred light his own; then he bit off a generous section of one end and followed suit. Fawcett refused. Fred sat down in his own swivel chair and leaned back.

"Well," he enquired, "let's have it."

"There is nothing to say as far as I am concerned," returned Fawcett stiffly. "My business is with the Police Department. Corcoran persuaded me to come here to hear what you might have to say."

"I?" said Fred. "Why, of course I'm sorry the accident happened, and of course I stand ready to make good any actual damage. But it *was* an accident, as I understand. Such things do happen."

Fawcett turned white.

"Is that the way you intend to take it, sir!" he cried. "I might have known! Well, then, let me tell you this, to your face: I don't give a damn who you are, this thing has got to be stopped. You are no less a criminal than that boy, putting such a deadly machine into irresponsible hands—yes, I say *criminal*! And if you won't control the situation, I shall do so myself. I am not going to subject myself or my family to the menace of sudden death at any time we choose to use the public streets. This has been going on just about long enough. *Somebody* has got to stop

it. And if the police are not effective, the next time I can lay my hands on him I'll give him the cow-hiding he ought to have had at home. And that is final, sir, final!"

Fawcett breathed hard and glared at Fred. Corcoran started to interfere, but Fred raised his hand.

"Just a minute, Chief," said he.

He contemplated Fawcett thoughtfully for a moment. This was evidently the sort of talk that had angered Minnie and violently terminated their interview over the telephone. It did not anger Fred: he was too accustomed to rough-and-tumble in business life. But it did make him speculate. Such a pitch of excitement was natural on the heels of the event: it was not natural now, except as hysteria—or as a *cumulative indignation*. Fawcett, as Fred remembered it, had the reputation of being a fairly sensible citizen.

"I do not mind your tone of voice, nor your language," he said at last, "though I will point out that even in the excitement of the moment I hardly think you were justified in using them to my wife."

Fawcett flushed and stirred uneasily.

"I am sorry for that. I will apologize to Mrs. Kirby. I was excited," he said curtly; then with a return of anger, "but I am not going to be diverted from what I feel is a public duty."

"That is twice you have used that term," said Fred. "If you think you can do so in a decent manner, would you mind telling me why? I am really asking for information," he added. "As I said, this seems to have been an unavoidable accident. I am fond of dogs myself, so I know how you feel, but I'm afraid I don't understand your attitude."

"Unavoidable accident!" repeated Fawcett bitterly.

"Well, wasn't it?" persisted Fred.

The other man's pallor flushed, but he compressed his lips in silence.

"I have nothing more to say," he said at last.

Fred laid aside his cigar and leaned forward.

"Now look here, Mr. Fawcett," he said, "I wish you would tell me exactly what happened. I want to know how it looked to you. You must remember I was not there."

"That's right, Mr. Fawcett; that's what I said," remarked Corcoran. "Never does no harm to talk it over."

Fawcett looked at Fred suspiciously, hesitated, finally grudg-

ingly told his story. Zozo had shot around the corner at an excessive rate of speed; it was a blind corner, and Zozo had "cut across" on the wrong side. The child, a little girl, had been crossing the street, and was about three quarters of the way over. She had not run out suddenly; she was merely crossing the street as any pedestrian would have crossed. Zozo had been going too fast to stop, and too fast to turn behind the child without danger of capsizing. He had, therefore, done the only thing possible and had shot in front of her. This had forced him over the shallow cobble-stoned gutter and partly across the ornamental parking beneath the shade trees. Fawcett and his dog were not on the street but on the sidewalk. The dog, panic stricken at the imminence of the car, had turned to bolt across the street. Unfortunately Zozo had recovered his direction at the same instant, so that his swerve back into the roadway had overtaken the animal.

These facts Fred elicited bit by bit, in supplement to Fawcett's main narrative.

"You see, Mr. Kirby," added Corcoran deferentially, "if your son had been driving with his car under control he could easily have stopped or gone behind the little girl."

"Yes, I see," agreed Fred. "It is more serious than I had been led to believe. I am glad you brought Mr. Fawcett in to see me. Now, I don't want you to think I doubt your word in any way, Mr. Fawcett, or to have you think I distrust your judgment, but I am going to ask if any but yourself were present."

"There were two witnesses, Mr. Kirby," spoke up the Chief quickly.

"And they corroborate the details of Mr. Fawcett's version?"

"Yes, sir; they do."

"I'm glad you came in," Fred repeated. "I had not known the circumstances. I had always considered my son a very careful and skilful driver."

Fawcett, who had by now completely calmed down, stared at him curiously.

"Mr. Kirby," he said earnestly after a moment's hesitation, "I am going to say over again what I said before with perhaps too much heat. Your son is and has long been a menace to public safety. He is absolutely reckless. If you have not known of his performances—and I am beginning to believe you have not—you should know it now."

Fred glanced at Corcoran.

"That's right, Mr. Kirby," said the Chief reluctantly. "I'm afraid that's so."

"Well, gentlemen," said Fred, rising, "I thank you for coming to me. I must ask you to believe me when I say that this is all news to me. You may, I think, trust me to handle the situation." He turned to Fawcett. "I cannot blame you, as this matter is presented to me now, for any action you may want to take. But I should much appreciate it if you would not force the issue. I cannot see that it will accomplish anything. I shall see that there is no further ground for complaint. As to what has already happened, I can only repeat my regret, and repeat also that it would most certainly not have happened had I known of what was going on. Of course, as to any possible reparation——"

But Fawcett waved this aside. Like most excitable people he swung easily to extremes.

"It isn't a question of that, Mr. Kirby," he said earnestly, "and I am very sorry I had to be the means of bringing this up."

"Never does no harm to talk things over," said Corcoran, as he gathered up his cap and gloves.

III

When the men had departed Fred left the office, though it was as yet only ten o'clock, and drove rapidly home. He was mortified and angry that he should have been subjected to this, that he should unwittingly have been forced to appear in the public eye as one who was either careless of the rights of his fellow men or of his own authority at home. He left the car at the front door and immediately sought out Minnie, whom he found in the "office" with Camilla. She looked up in surprise at his untimely appearance.

"Well, Fred!" she cried; then as she caught sight of his stern face, "Did you see that man?"

"I want to talk to you privately a few minutes," said Fred.

Camilla arose and disappeared. Fred rang the bell.

"Tell Zozo I wish to see him in the library at once," he commanded the servant.

"What is it, Fred? Did you——?" began Minnie, but he cut her short.

"I have looked into this matter thoroughly, and I am going to settle it. And I need no interference."

Minnie recognized this mood. Fred seldom roused, but when he did he was as direct, as ruthless, as unopposable as a cyclone. Nothing to do but stand aside, and bide the time.

Nevertheless, she ventured an inquiry.

"Come into the library and you will find out," he answered.

They sat there in silence until the culprit appeared, badly frightened, and deeply retired into his defences of silence. Fred did not question him. He spoke curtly, succinctly, with deadly emphasis.

"Young man," said he, "I find that you lied to me in your account of what happened last night. You were criminally careless, you drove at a high rate of speed, you escaped murder by the narrowest margin. Furthermore, I find that for some time past you have conducted yourself with flagrant disregard of the law, of common decency, of the rights, feelings, or safety of the people among whom you live. You have been spoken of to me to-day as 'a public menace,' and I find to my deep regret and chagrin that I must agree with that verdict. I am not going to preach at you; you are old enough to see for yourself that you cannot do these things. You may go to your room now and think this thing over, carefully. If you have been thoughtless, now is your chance to take thought."

Zozo, relieved that he was not to be forced to answer questions or make promises or otherwise break his congenial dumbness, shuffled his feet preliminary to escape.

"Wait one moment," his father stopped him, "I have not finished. From now on you will be deprived of your car. I owe that much to public safety. And you will not, at any time, in any place, under any circumstances whatever, drive any other car. If I hear of your doing so, I shall know what measures to take. That's all."

This complete crashing of the firmament aroused Zozo to strangled speech.

"For how long?" he muttered.

"Until I am convinced that you are grown-up enough and responsible enough to be trusted. You may go now to your room."

Zozo crept out, crushed.

IV

As soon as the door had closed behind him Minnie burst forth.

"Do you mean to tell me," she cried, "that you take the word

of that creature against your own son! If you could have heard the tone he took with me!"

"I have a very clear idea of what happened," said Fred curtly, "and others tell the same story. I am humiliated and mortified at what I have learned to-day. Zozo has very evidently lacked the proper discipline."

"On the contrary, as you very well know, no child has ever been more carefully brought up," flared Minnie.

"Then he is naturally vicious or too young. I prefer to believe the latter. He has conducted himself without a thought in the world for the safety of others. He is unfit to have a car, and he's not going to have one until he is grown up."

"But——" began Minnie.

"That is final," said Fred.

She stared at him speechless for a moment, a deadly anger suffocating her. She struggled hard for control. She realized in helpless rage that she could do nothing. In this mood Fred simply could not be handled.

"I have made up my mind," stated Fred vigorously and quite unnecessarily, "and I don't want to hear any talk from anybody about it again."

He arose to leave. She arose, too, her face scarlet.

"I suppose it will have to be as you say," she rejoined in a suppressed voice, "but I think you will regret taking this high-handed course with me."

She herself left the room. He stared after her, his anger for the moment transferred to her. It was the instinctive anger against injustice, though he could not have told what injustice. Fred never reasoned things out. He felt.

V

Minnie went directly upstairs to Zozo's room. Zozo was flat on the bed. At her entrance he turned his face away to conceal the fact that he had been crying. He was now close to fifteen years of age and he had his pride.

Minnie sat by him on the bed.

"Mother is so sorry!" she said. She flung her arm around his shoulder and buried her face with his.

Zozo tried desperately to retain his habitual shell of sullenness intact. But forces were too strong for him. In spite of the numerous prohibitions and inhibitions to which his life had always

been subjected, this was his very first serious disappointment. He had no moral resources with which to meet it: none! And when, in place of expected admonition and reproach—which habit would have enabled him to withstand stoically—he was offered this sympathy, his defences went down. He gulped, struggled, burst into shameless tears. Minnie held him close, petting him as she had used to pet him, uttering little comforting, endearing phrases.

"I *wasn't* going fast; I *wasn't*!" he choked at last.

"I know, darling; I know!" crooned Minnie.

"Those old dodoes don't know anything about driving."

"I know, dear," repeated Minnie.

"I don't know *how* I'll do without my car."

"It's a shame, dear; but Father is very angry now. We'll have to be brave and wait until he gets over it. I'll see what I can do when the time comes. But we'll have to wait."

"How long do you think?" asked Zozo, plucking up a little hope.

"I don't know. Your father is sometimes very obstinate."

"He's *mean*!" cried Zozo.

"You mustn't criticize your father," interrupted Minnie with a half-hearted remnant of loyalty to parental authority.

"Just the same he is," insisted Zozo obstinately.

"I'll see what I can do, darling. But you must be patient."

"Well, I want my car. It's mine: I got a right to it."

"And you shall have it, but you'll have to be patient," repeated Minnie. "And now try to forget it, and be sure to eat a good supper."

She left the room in a tenderly exalted mood. She felt that she had drawn nearer her baby than she had been for years. That was true. In what way or at what cost it did not occur to her to enquire.

CHAPTER LII

I

FRED drove back to his office, but he found it almost impossible to work. Something long submerged and therefore ignored had come to the surface and demanded attention, something to which he had never given consideration, something which he had taken for granted. The whole episode had shaken him badly. About three o'clock he left abruptly in the middle of a dictation. He entered his car and drove out to the Country Club. But he did not go in. Suddenly he realized that therein he would find not one man with whom he could foregather in the old relationships. Either they stood in awe of him, or were his antagonists in power, or wanted something of him, or had subtly withdrawn a little distance lest they become involved. No use going home. A wave of sheer loneliness overtook him.

He drove about idly for an hour. Then a sudden impulse of recollection turned him into Maple Street, and he stopped at the gate of Cousin Jim's place.

As on the previous occasion the old man was bent over his bright silks and feathers, tying flies; and as before he merely looked over his spectacles and nodded as Fred entered the room. But he instantly laid them down and removed his glasses when he had had a look at Fred's face.

"What is it, Fred?" he asked.

"It's Zozo," burst out Fred. "Jim, I don't know what in hell to do with that youngster of mine!"

Cousin Jim looked at him quizzically.

"What's the angel child been up to?" he enquired without concern, "smoking, booze, or girls? They all do blunder on the astonishing fact of their existence, you know."

"No, no," Fred negatived impatiently. "It's just plain lawlessness. He's out of hand. He thinks he's the whole works and the gilt case and the brass chimes on top. And you can't get at him. He's like a hard-boiled egg. He thinks there's nobody on earth but him. He's——"

"Sit down, Fred," commanded Cousin Jim firmly. "Light a cigar. Now tell me what you're driving at. What specifically has happened?"

"Well, it's that car," Fred explained. "He goes skyhooting around the streets like a bat out of hell, and he's got people so wild-eyed they want to lynch him. Yesterday he ran over a man's dog and nearly over a child——"

"I've been meaning to speak to you about that car," said Cousin Jim, "but I've sort of hesitated to interfere. It's really pretty dangerous for so young a boy to handle such a powerful thing. He hasn't the judgment. Why do you let him do it?"

"Oh, I've taken it away from him. But it isn't that. That's just opened my eyes. It's his confounded lawlessness, I tell you. When I was a kid I toed the mark or I got my hide tanned good and plenty."

Cousin Jim smoked soberly. Lines had deepened in his face, lines of real trouble and sympathetic concern. It was as if an old worry had rekindled in him.

"I blame myself for my stupidity," he remarked, but as though talking to himself.

"*Your stupidity!*" repeated Fred, puzzled.

"My stupidity toward Zozo," said Cousin Jim. "I don't pretend not to know what you mean. It isn't this thing alone: it's the walls around him. I can't for the life of me break them down. I've tried, too." He smoked for a moment. "It's absurd, Fred. Here are we two old duffers just rotten ripe with experience and we can't help his greenness toward an atom's worth of development. We can't touch him. Why *is* it?"

"It's because he has been spoiled," growled Fred. "A few lickings when he was younger——"

Cousin Jim shook his head and smiled ruefully.

"Oh, you weren't such a wonder yourself, Fred. There's an insulation about youth. It's normal, and it's all right. It's for its own purpose of preserving and maintaining its own individual opportunity of development. Otherwise we'd bring up the next generation as nice little automatic replicas of ourselves. We have to look on and suffer, and we can't help."

"Then I suppose we've just to turn 'em loose, according to you, and let 'em go until they kill somebody and land in jail," growled Fred. "Hell, Jim, be practical!"

"Everybody's always telling me to be practical," complained

Cousin Jim, half-humorously. "I am practical. I'm a cussed sight more practical than you are. At least I don't go blindly on trying to repeat the impossible."

Fred's agitation was calming somehow, he could not have told why. The fever had been taken out of the incident. Perspectives had rearranged themselves. This was not because of anything that had been said: it was only Cousin Jim. He arose from his chair, stretched himself, and went to lie on the sofa. The setter, who had been eyeing him tail a-quiver, promptly hopped up alongside him. He smoothed the dog's head.

"I suppose you are right," he said after a moment. "What's the answer?"

"I don't know. But there is an answer. There's something wrong in the relations: that's the trouble. It's a natural antagonism, unnaturally aggravated. We're older; and we ought to know better."

"Look here," suggested Fred after a pause, "why don't you talk to him?"

"I can't touch Zozo with a ten-foot pole any more," confessed Cousin Jim regretfully. "He's at the wrong age for me, Fred. Just now he's probably judging his fellows entirely by whether their trousers bag at the knees. At that age one is controlled by glittering admirations. It runs its course, but it is very real. I wish I could remember at just what age real awakening begins. I do remember that my basis was the size of a man's biceps. I used to sit in church and observe very accurately just the set of a man's coat on his shoulders and try to estimate the size of his muscles. The first suit of clothes I got for myself had a sort of diagonal stripe in it because I noticed that gave an illusion of size. Great age, that!" He chuckled. "I shouldn't worry too much about Zozo. He's only doing the usual thing with bigger facilities."

"I suppose we do grow out of it," Fred agreed, doubtfully. "But in the meantime?"

"Why don't you send him up in the woods somewhere for a while? Get a guide or somebody to take him off and teach him a few new tricks?"

"It would be a good idea," agreed Fred, but doubtfully, "but I don't know about Minnie—and I haven't time——"

"Well, probably he'll grow out of it," observed Cousin Jim vaguely.

"Probably," agreed Fred.

Nothing seemed to have been settled, but at least that appalling cloud of abstract loneliness seemed to have thinned. They said nothing for some time. Then Cousin Jim chuckled. Fred challenged the obvious mischief in it.

"I was just thinking about what you said about having time. It does cost like hell to be rich, doesn't it, Fred? Now, tell me, how many million dollars do you think it would cost you to go trout fishing with me a couple of days next week? It's going to cost me about ten dollars."

"You go to hell," said Fred. "It isn't a question of how much it would cost me."

"You seem to think you can buy anything you want. Well, you cannot!" shot back Cousin Jim. "You couldn't afford to buy this pipe. And it's the very finest pipe in the world. Don't tell me you don't want it. *Anybody* would want it."

Fred cast an oblique glance at the black and charred old relic; but scorned reply. Another silence fell.

"Do you know what profession I'd choose, Fred, if I had my life to live over again?" asked Cousin Jim. Then as Fred snorted derisively he repeated with more emphasis, "Yes: I said *profession!* I'd start a post-graduate course for educating teachers, not in book knowledge, but in the handling of plastic minds; how to enter into them and keep them open without damaging them. It would be a great work. Somebody will do it some day as it should be done. There will be an accepted progressive standard of teaching how to keep susceptible and flexible what education now too often makes rigid and arrogant——"

Cousin Jim was off on one of his favourite dissertations. Fred ceased to listen. But as though from some magic in the glowing fireplace a pang of painful illumination entered his heart. He yearned over his boy in a weight of doubt for the past and concern for the future. All his anger and reprobation had vanished. This beckoning spectre of reproach led him back and back into his own blind too-preoccupied life, and left him finally face to face with an exhausting, baffling circle of speculation on inheritance and environment. He felt old and helpless.

Jim was asking a question. What was it?

"I was saying," he repeated, "if you had your own life to live over, Fred, what would *you* do?"

"Heavens! Darn you, Jim, what an uncomfortable question!"

cried Fred, rising so abruptly as to dump overboard the reproachful setter. "I'm going home. You're as cheering as a pocket in a shirt. Torment yourself alone."

Nevertheless, as he drove back to the Lake, he felt somehow relieved, lightened, happier in spite of everything, than he had been for a long time. He was even oblivious of the changed atmosphere, of the rift that had silently widened in his human relationships at home. The realization of that would come later. Jim was a good old goat!

II

But the glow could not last. As he entered the gates of his own grounds the atmosphere rather than the realization of what had happened returned upon him. He seemed somehow to be looking across an impassable gulf that had suddenly opened in a familiar landscape. Things had mysteriously changed—and irrevocably.

He passed through the great hallway on his way to his own room. Halfway he stopped and looked about him. Of late, by dint of much exhibition to admiring people he had worked up considerable pride in the house; not in its artistic features, but in the perfection of its response to every possible human need, from hot-air laundry driers in case of rainy weather to thermostatic control of the radiators. These things had little by little adopted him, until he had come to feel a unity with the place, as though he actually belonged. Now, for some reason or other which he could not have analysed, he felt alien, thrust outside. It was as if he were looking on something that was past, as though he were not standing in the centre of his own possessions, but were revisiting a place that had been sold, or were contemplating the photographs of something that had been destroyed. And when he spoke to himself, it was in the past tense, as if in reminiscence of what was irrevocably gone.

"It was so *complete*," he sighed with regret.

Funny thing to say! Funny way to feel! But deep down in him was a dreary feeling of transference, as though the centre of his being had been shifted. It was no longer here: it was down in his office spinning out its endless details that this thing outside of himself might go on.

He had stopped short, trying with puzzled brows to grasp this reality that just eluded him. Fred was not introspective, he was not subtle. He could not grasp it.

CHAPTER LIII

I

BUT the hard, bright surface of Minnie's life was as yet untouched by the deeper dissatisfactions that prelude, or stimulate, or are growth. She was not dissatisfied, though as time went on she was increasingly annoyed by more and more things. There is here a considerable distinction. Annoyances do not make for opportunities of growth; on the contrary they harden. And annoyances she met in a spirit of arrogant combat.

The stupidity of people was one of the worst of her annoyances. She could never get used to the fact that common humanity was not as quickly clever as herself; nor could she become accustomed to the phenomenon that even when people were clever they did not invariably approach a problem from the same angle as herself and so did not act quite as she had anticipated they would act.

"I should think they could see——" whatever it was, was one of her exasperated cries.

She picked up one crony after another, rushed her for a while in mad and exclusive intimacy, and threw her aside when she showed herself too "stupid" or at variance with Minnie's ideas. Minnie really imagined that she was gaining in knowledge of life through these experiences, disproving illusion, discovering the always-existent baseness of the human race; and, while disappointed, she secretly prided herself on her progress in worldly wisdom. More and more she was being isolated; and was orgulous thereanent, for the fact proved her of rarer clay. She looked on it as an indication of fineness of grain. Curiously enough this emergence was, in her own mind, not that she considered herself better, but she was finding out that other people were worse. She considered that, personally, she was quite a violet of modesty as to herself.

Thus the hard bright surface was thickening slowly. The drugged imprisoned soul stirred in its instinctive protest. But few of its stirrings reached her consciousness, and then were

translated as vexations which only strengthened that disillusionment with life which she considered praiseworthy wisdom, and that growing stale flatness of existence which she considered it obligatory for one of spirit—like herself—to face with undaunted front. She knew what was expected of one in her position!

But she, too, though belated, was nearing her moment.

II

The morning was gay and bright with the springtime. Minnie had no response for it: she did not see it. There had been another annoyance—or was it more serious? Mrs. Dunning, at tea the afternoon before, had quite casually mentioned Zozo.

"He's grown up *such* a good-looking boy," she said with intent to please. "I saw him to-day at the wheel of your Rolls-Royce."

"Oh, I think you're mistaken," said Minnie. "He wouldn't be driving."

"A man *does* look queer driving a limousine, unless he's a chauffeur," laughed Mrs. Dunning, "but Zozo is so *fond* of driving different cars, isn't he? Quite a mechanical genius!"

The bit of information disturbed her far beyond its apparent importance. If he had actually taken the new limousine out, the act amounted to frank rebellion. The prohibition had been explicit. She instituted quiet investigation in terms of the third degree, and found it to be too true! She was unreasonably down, unreasonably depressed over it. Absurd to lay so much stress on a youthful escapade. But if beloved Zozo deceived her, whom could she trust?

She passed from her room slowly, buttoning her gloves. Mrs. Pine was giving a luncheon for her and it was going to be dull. Camilla, on her way to the office, greeted her with a good example of the Camilla-brightness. Minnie looked after her with an unexpected distaste. It had not occurred to her before, but all of a sudden she realized that Camilla got on her nerves frightfully. She was so gushing! She was at times so stupid!

Halfway across the big entrance hall she encountered Zozo. She actually shrank. Of course, she should take this matter of disobedience firmly in hand, but for the first time she would have avoided an issue. A great inner revulsion of weariness rose within her.

But Zozo came slowly to meet her.

"Mother," he muttered, "I got something to tell you."

"What is it, Zozo?"

"I took out the big car. I wanted to see how its engine pulled. I ought not to have done that. I am sorry."

Minnie's spirit swooped upward like a bird.

"I'm so glad you told Mother, Zozo," she said. "It was wrong of you to do it, but it was brave of you to tell me. And you won't do it again, will you?"

"No, ma'am," said Zozo.

She kissed him and went on her way, her heart singing.

Zozo gladly escaped. The evening before he had learned secretly from the loyal Etienne that the investigation was forward. Zozo possessed cunning, and evidently a certain amount of courage. It cost him a terror-ridden night and an almost superhuman resolution, but he put it over. It was better to confess nobly than to be accused ignominiously. The thing had worked exactly as he had hoped. Saved! Poor Minnie! Like has a magnetic attraction for like. She believed firmly in and looked for deceit and ingratitude as the basis of human nature, and deceit and ingratitude came at her inner call.

III

And since these things were realities they seeped down beneath the hard surface brightness and touched the drugged soul and on it exerted their mysterious alchemy. Hidden, the reaction bided its time to register itself. Minnie's consciousness did not know that. In rebound she was now on the crest of the wave. Nothing bothered her. Even the feminine lunch at the Pines' had ceased to appall. She descended her wide front steps attended by a solicitous footman, eager to relieve her of the physical necessity of turning the door-handle of her limousine or spreading the gossamer of a light rug. It was unfortunate, but it would not have been seemly for him to lift her legs for her. Also she was doing her own breathing.

As the car rolled down the long drive and out the Five Thousand Dollar Gates, it needed only the presence of a few wistful, preferably shawl-clad members of The Poor for her to sniff at to have made a perfect scene for a movie. As a matter of fact Minnie would not have sniffed at The Poor, had they been there. She was not really the sniffing kind, and she was too busy thinking how she could return Zozo into possession of his engine of destruction. She had anticipated no great trouble in this mat-

ter, after a reasonable time had elapsed. More than the reasonable time had elapsed, but she had made no progress. Fred had proved unexpectedly obstinate; and somehow it was more difficult to get at him across the gulf that had opened. And imperceptibly this affair of Zozo's car had become a symbolic force that continued to make the gulf wider. She looked across at Fred at times with a secret marvelling. Actually he seemed almost like a stranger!

The car pulled up at the Pine residence, and the footman, after opening the limousine door and standing solicitously to ascertain if she could step out all by herself, ran nimbly to press the bell. Minnie, even following leisurely, was forced to wait for a moment or so before the door was at length opened. A sense of unpreparedness impressed her.

"Isn't to-day Mrs. Pine's luncheon?" she asked.

"Yes, madam," replied the man with hesitation. Then he added, "—at one-thirty, madam."

"I thought it was at one," said Minnie with vexation. She paused, undecided. "I'll come in," she said at last, "and wait. Tell Mrs. Pine not to hurry."

She sauntered into the reception room. Now a reception room that has been made "modern" as meticulously as the emulative Pines' has about as much in it to attract and retain the interest as a dentist's waiting room. One's mind is presumably to contemplate in both cases only the approaching ordeal. There were, to be sure, a few books instead of magazines on the table. The incredible antiquity of the latter was compensated by the fact that the books were of the strangely impractical format deemed suitable for "gifts." For sheer lack of anything else to do Minnie picked up one of these books and idly ruffled over the pages. Her eyes fell on a poem that she recognized as having read and thrilled over in her college days, years and years ago.

Hark! ah, the nightingale—

The tawny-throated!

Hark from that moonlit cedar what a burst

What triumph! hark!—what pain!

She read it through line on line to the very end:

Listen, Eugenia—

How thick the bursts come crowding through the leaves!

Again—thou hearest?
Eternal passion!
Eternal pain!

She closed the book, her finger between the leaves. Somehow she had sustained a little shock. Her mind had recognized fully the striking beauty of the lines, acknowledged the stimulating quality. But her appreciation was entirely mental. She herself could not respond to it.

Why? Why was she closed to its influence?

The perfect self-satisfaction of the day suddenly vanished. She glanced at the back of the volume. One of the first things she must do next time she went downtown—no, she would telephone Markens to send the book at once, if it was not already in the library. She must own it, have it where she could re-read it, when she had time. But as she stood there, shocked into a poised waiting of the spirit by her discovery, a curious flash of illumination came to her. She saw that she planned only for the corporeal possession of the poem. The beautiful moments of flight, when it had been hers in reality as well, had passed unrecorded into the depths of her.

A strong intruding, uplifting surge raised her. She seemed for a brief moment to hang poised in time. It was almost as if memory had failed her, wiping out all record of her days and occupations and possessions; a blank behind her, a blank before her; she herself alone with the value of the present moment.

She picked up the book and read the poem again. Now the words of magic release lifted her as on the wings of the lark. She rose in a sheer exultation of life. Marvellous! Not for years had she broken through the shell like this, not since she was in college. Her heart swelled. Tears filled her eyes.

Mrs. Pine spoke her name from the doorway. She came back with a snap and a click to her groove. The past was there; the gorgeous potent future awaited her capable hands. She shook herself slightly as one would shake the shine of confetti from one's garments.

IV

That was a curious experience to have had! Minnie could not understand it. Still less could she understand how so trivial a thing had shaken her point of view so completely. Yet it had.

For the first time she felt the stirrings of a genuine impatience as she proceeded with the routine of the lunch party. There seemed to have "something gone small with the lot." She resented this shift of her centre of consciousness and fought it the more fiercely because it bewildered her. In vain she told over the material facts of her life as one would tell over the beads of a rosary. The polished brightness of her satisfaction was clouded by the haunting memory of that strange moment of illumination, that passing breath of life. In vain she reminded herself that she had everything any mortal could desire; that the order of her days was exactly as she had planned it; that she would not trade her position for that of any one in the world. Twice, in spite of herself, in the very chatter of the lunch party, she again experienced the feeling of hanging suspended in the void of time, the past obliterated, the future a blank, only the present moment illuminated. And both times, as a centre, was a foolish, irrelevant picture. The first was of an absurd play of life—two tumbling puppies. The second was a vision of defined beauty—a great tree in radiance with sun on its leaves. For the moment she was lost in it. How unreal it looked: how far above, struggling with wind and sun, wrestling with sun and wind!

She shook herself to alertness, a little alarmed. She did not recognize the instinctive stirrings, the faint gaspings of the slowly smothering soul. Was she losing her mind?

After the luncheon was over she ordered the car driven slowly by way of a back road. She was seriously disturbed about herself. Two hours ago she was satisfied with herself, and her life, and her possessions. Now, of a sudden and unreasonably, everything had gone stale. It must be that she was not well. The inevitable disappointment of little things bothered her more and more. Maybe she needed a tonic. Just yesterday she had been able to feel such a keen excitement in anticipation and construction. That was all gone, and she shrank from an instinctive knowledge that it had gone for always. Flat, flat, flat; everything was flat! A restlessness she was ashamed of, it was so unreasonable, beat for an outlet. She had everything; could do anything she wished; she could go anywhere she desired: but something was lacking. Even a short time since she had been always looking forward; lately she seemed to have been kept looking around and around and around, and the depths of her were hardly ever stirred by the old enthusiasm. With all she had, it was positively wicked of her to

be so bored. Perhaps it was a first sign of old age! She was well in her forties!

At about this stage in her cogitations the whole sky irresistibly darkened. For a few moments not a ray of sunlight struck through. Everything was wrong. The weather was disgusting! She couldn't budge Fred! Camilla was getting on her nerves! Even Zozo sometimes irritated her by the single-track quality of his mind.

Minnie sat stiffly erect in her car and looked at the innocent passers-by bitterly. It was all very well for people to envy her, but she'd like to know what they'd do with all her cares and responsibilities? They'd be willing to trade back to their own estate in a week—a day! Look at that young woman outside that ramshacklety, unpainted little house they were passing! She was a good-looking creature, high coloured, deep bosomed, with abundant tumbled hair. Here it was three o'clock in the afternoon, and yet apparently she had nothing to do but roll around on the grass with a gurgling fat baby! Three o'clock in the afternoon! As Minnie's limousine passed, the woman stopped playing with the baby and looked after it. Probably she was envying its occupant. What did she know about real responsibility? What did she know of how hard people of wealth worked?

Minnie sank back against the upholstery. Suddenly she felt very tired.

CHAPTER LIV

I

WHEN a man is hungry he seeks for something to eat; when he is thirsty, for something to drink. His success in finding what is good for him depends very largely on how keen and unpervverted are his bodily instincts.

The same with his soul. When that is at last aroused from its lethargy, it gropes for its needed sustenance.

Fred, being at bottom an uncomplicated creature, and one who had been always groping more or less, turned with a beautiful simplicity and directness to Cousin Jim. He thought he did this because he was lonesome, and of all the human beings by whom he was surrounded Cousin Jim was about the only one of the old-timers whom he could meet on the old-time footing. It was restful. Over the whole relationship that now sprang up between the two men was, in the remote background of Fred's consciousness, an ashamed sort of schoolboy guilt. Somehow, and very vaguely, he felt that there must be, at least in Minnie's eyes, something most reprehensible in wasting time as crowded as his in doing nothing at Cousin Jim's.

When he left the office, he turned again instinctively into Maple Street.

This time he made straight for the sofa and lay down, snapping his fingers at the setter in invitation. Only after he was comfortably settled did he speak.

"Hullo, Jim," said he.

"Hullo, Fred," said Cousin Jim; and went on reading.

From that time on, the late afternoon visit with Cousin Jim became almost a daily habit. Those naïve souls who think the rich must be constantly and elaborately entertained—and who try to be fascinating on that basis—would have been puzzled. Cousin Jim was always at home. On Fred's entrance he merely looked up and nodded. They exchanged a brief greeting. After an hour or more Fred continued on to the palace. Nothing more humdrum or less-than-oriental magnificence could be imagined.

There was no particular attempt at conversation. Fred couldn't talk. That seemed funny, because there were really quite a few things he wanted to talk about; but he couldn't quite rise to it. Cousin Jim did all the dissertating, jerkily, with long silences between. The meetings were smoky affairs, with Cousin Jim puttering about or reading and Fred stretched out on the sofa.

He was attentive enough. He rarely dozed off now, but just lay and smoked comfortably, and listened to Cousin Jim's rare remarks. The latter were like side comments thrown off from occupation, having a grateful quality of leisure, calling for no antiphony or comment. Fred had not had such a comfortably good time since he used to putter around the garden on the Hill in the old days, and wonder whether he could afford new flash boardings for the house.

Since this quiet hour answered a thirsty need in him, it swiftly grew on him as a habit. Presently just the sight of the sofa and the fire and the late afternoon sun through the little-paned windows—merely the dusky, slightly dusty look over everything—made him feel better. He even took a chance at a marvellous malt preparation Cousin Jim urged on him, the precursor of homebrew.

"This'll do you good," said Cousin Jim, "put hair on your chest."

"I'm fat as a seal now," protested Fred.

"You're bloated as a walrus, you mean," stated Cousin Jim, severely. "And this is great stuff. Made it myself. Try it."

Fred tried it, just to please. It was rotten dope, he thought; but he could get away with it. Cousin Jim brought it out every time, and they sipped it together and blew clouds of smoke. Penalty one paid for coming to see Cousin Jim—and then to his astonishment Fred found he was beginning to like it and to look forward to it in an absurdly childish fashion!

Every once in a while Cousin Jim would read out bits of paragraphs from his book or magazine. And then he would chuckle hugely, or snort indignantly, or argue. He did not seem to expect a response from Fred; nor did he get more than just enough to keep him going. All sorts of things he read in fragments, ephemeral wit, vulgar jest, quaint turns of phrase, erudition, deep philosophy—many things that Fred had never heard of. But that didn't bother him; didn't even arouse him. Cousin Jim had

a comfortable way of taking it for granted that he knew all about them, or could understand them; or that, if he didn't, it did not really matter! Fred liked to listen without the responsibility of agreement or argument, or even of being interested or pretending to be. Most of this stuff would have been pretty tiresome to him if he had been forced to pay attention.

But under the spell of old Jim's grasp of things, and his amusing and humanizing dissertations on them, he actually began to get interested. Fred was being educated, though he did not know it. Cousin Jim talked naturally and freely about a whole lot of things that would ordinarily have made Fred shy, such as immortality, spirit, ideals, and similar shamefaced topics. They would have been impossible if they had not been doctored up by some good old goat like Jim. Fred wondered how he could be so keen about such things? He talked of them as other men talked of business or golf or tennis, with the same air of their being—well—sort of practical everyday matters, like teapots. The best of it was Fred did not have to do anything about it—he just lay back and smoked and listened and chuckled. And absorbed.

Old Jim was certainly a wonder! He didn't often talk; but when he did, he showed he must do a hell of a lot of thinking sometime!

About six o'clock Fred would get up abruptly and go out.

"Well, so long!" he would shout back over his shoulder.

The joke of it was he rather kept these visits secret from Minnie. They were not precisely concealed; but they were elaborately not mentioned. And in time that amounted to concealment, conspirational concealment! But Fred was growing because in this very simple fashion he was absorbing what he needed.

II

Minnie, on the other hand, reacted against her moment of the divine dissatisfaction in quite a different manner. She was not one to accept anything without analysing it. Minnie was intellectual, too intellectual for her own good. She could not receive by absorption.

So she sat herself right down and picked the butterfly to pieces. Since Doctor Gray pronounced her sound in wind and limb, the trouble must be wholly mental. Minnie pulled her life apart, looked it over, and decided that her trouble was too strong an emphasis on the merely social side of existence. She remembered

a fragment of her talk with Cousin Jim, and concluded that he had been right about one thing: she should do more constructive work, not of the delegated description, but something that would exercise her own personal correlations in the sense that she would be *learning* to do something. It did not matter much what—anything would do, provided it interested her and was constructive in some way. What was necessary was a spiritual calisthenics in a rationalized course of spiritual hygiene. Having thus capably prescribed, she dismissed her soul with full assurance that it would be attended to.

Abruptly, to the amusement of many and the consternation of others, she withdrew from most of her purely social activities. By way of making a start on the newer better life she began to take golf lessons at the Country Club, and imported a lecturer for a series on the Influence of the Early Italian on the Renaissance. The one was for the sake of physical correlations; the other, to widen her horizon.

The only trouble was that she almost immediately found that both golf and the Renaissance bored her to extinction. It never shook the centre of her being whether she made a hole in two or ten; and the Renaissance was too remotely connected with to-day. Undaunted, she dropped them abruptly and tried something else. The world is "so full of a number of things"; surely all that was required was a certain patience and persistence in search.

There followed a rapid succession of all sorts of activities. For a time she plunged on needlework—embroideries and tapestries emphasized. The discouraging thing about that was Angélique. Angélique could produce any given work twice as well in half the time. Minnie recognized this as a benumbing psychological factor and abandoned the art. She was strong on analytical psychology in those days. She tried gardening. Surely on two hundred acres of palace grounds there was room enough for the puny personal efforts of a humble owner! Minnie wore a becoming shade hat, practical gloves, an enveloping overall apron, and stout boots. She might have been seen digging with her own hands! For a time this promised a real outlet. She bought books and studied and got interested in such things as colour effects and naturalizing strange plants. But who was she to buck tradition? The Scotch are a wonderfully steadfast race; especially when they happen to be gardeners. They are strong on the traditions of their craft as to usual arrangements, bedding-

out methods and the like; they dislike innovation; they believe in God and the idea that nobody knows anything but themselves. As a race they are remarkably gifted with an ability to express more disapproval through silent acquiescence than any one else could get over with the assistance of a headsman's axe. Also they possess an infallible black magic. Blights, scales, and all the visitations from heaven such as were suffered by the Chosen Ones of Israel descend on all other pet schemes but their own. By making of it a life profession certain indomitable individuals have put it over on a Scotch gardener. I do not know them myself. They belong to the legendary Heroic Age. After having learned these things, and been confronted with unassailable alibis, Minnie quit. The experienced men then went methodically ahead keeping hedges clipped and assuring a succession of bloom.

Bookbinding came next. This was a real and personal handicraft. She had experts collect tools for her, and leathers, and other materials. She took lessons in design. Then came pottery again, on a more serious note than before; and the long-dead kiln was refired. It seemed a brilliant idea to distil her own perfumes from the flowers grown on her place. She attempted wood-carving and fine cabinet work.

With that she came temporarily to the end. Her clear brain fairly shouted certain generalizations to her. She really had no outstanding talents, no natural outlets. She was merely cleverly imitative when it came to creating things with her own hands. She was really too old to begin anything. And there obtruded always the devastating truth that no matter how long and painfully she strove, she merely succeeded in producing an inferior article that her money could buy elsewhere and better! She was after all occupying herself, not expressing herself.

III

About this time, from some obscure and mystic prompting, she too was impelled toward Cousin Jim. The orientations of the human soul toward its necessity are often very astonishing. They are as blind and instinctive as the gropings of a new-born baby for the breast. Cousin Jim could, consciously, have taught her nothing. It is probable that even unconsciously he could have given her nothing. But in him existed something—perhaps unusable, existing as constituent raw material, so to speak—which

her own life wholly lacked; and without appreciation or plan her being veered toward it in a last swing before it settled into a permanent disillusionment.

As usual she rationalized the impulse. She accused herself again of having neglected Cousin Jim; and she set about determinedly to remedy that neglect. It could be done quite simply by buying him up. Minnie had definitely attained to that wealthy habit of thought. Rich people come in time by experience to believe that if they have neglected a person, or been inconsiderate toward him, or unjust, or even rude, they can make that person an expensive present and all will be well—except that the recipient is thrown into a helpless rage: he cannot refuse without seeming to harbour resentment.

Minnie had not consciously done any of these things to Cousin Jim. Nevertheless, somehow she felt she had to buy him. In some occult fashion his troubled eyes haunted her. Why *was* it the thought of the man so persisted? He was as bad as a conscience; yet she honestly felt, as far as she was concerned, she was doing her best with life. She had, indeed, not seen as much of him as she should; but that was largely because of his unadaptable habits. It was time she took hold of him with a firm hand. That is how Minnie rationalized her impulse; and that is how she twisted it in her usual masterful style to an interpretation of dominance.

She ordered the limousine and drove to his house. She arrived about four o'clock, and encountered him just returning.

"Well, well!" he cried, "this is a surprise. Nothing wrong, is there?" he asked with sudden anxiety.

"I just came to see you," she smiled. "You are not very flattering."

"I am overwhelmed," denied Cousin Jim, unlocking the front door.

Minnie stepped into the littered front room with its high many-paned windows. She made a singularly incongruous figure as she stood there in her modish clothes. The room seemed visibly to become smaller and shabbier. Her eyes noted the worn old carpet, the threadbare upholstery, the curtains hung awry, the tobacco ash on the hearth, the untidy centre table with its scattered books and its incredible litter of papers. All these things stood starkly out unrelieved, for the little comfortable gods of the room had shrunk away from her resplendent worldliness; and

their glamour with them. A pang shot through Minnie's heart at what she thought she saw there of loneliness and neglect.

Cousin Jim was rambling on with some idiotic talk about how sorry he was that the butler and the footman were both out. She broke in on him with generous passion.

"Oh, Cousin Jim!" she cried, "why is it you won't let us do something for you? We have so much! It worries me. You ought to have a share in all this. You are our own kith and kin. It's only right!"

"Sit down, my dear, do," said Cousin Jim kindly. "I advise the leather chair. That other one has appendicitis or something hard in his little inside. I've been meaning to operate. Do you mind if I smoke?" He filled and lighted his pipe deliberately. "Why," he answered her question at last, "I'm perfectly all right. We've talked that all over before."

"But there must be *something* you want," protested Minnie.

"Well," said Cousin Jim slowly, with the characteristic far-away look of his more careful speech, "well, Minnie, I won't deny that if you'd asked me that question some years ago, I would have answered differently. There was a time when I longed quite passionately to travel. I had an idea I wanted to see all the corners of the world and all colours and shapes of people and all the ideals and reactions to life that there were."

"Oh, that would be so easy to arrange," cried Minnie. "We'd *love* to do it!"

"That was many years ago," repeated Cousin Jim. "Then, quite by accident it seems yet, life bumped me pretty hard." He puffed strongly on his pipe. Minnie could find nothing to say, but a real sympathy welled up in her, and the little comfortable gods peeped out again, and the room was changed. "That was many years ago, too," he continued. "It jarred me pretty badly. My hold on material things was loosened and I found myself in a very desert of despair. But a strange thing happened to me: I found in that desert a few very beautiful things, very beautiful, Minnie. I asked myself why they seemed to me so much more beautiful than anything I had ever noticed in life before, even when it was—— Well, I got an answer. It was because they were indestructible, and yet they were warm and glowing with life. So you see it is not much use travelling. I'd rather stay at home and try to collect those things. I am quite selfish and greedy about them. I don't know that you——" He broke off

a little embarrassed; and the old humorous twinkle came back into his eyes. "To tell the truth, I haven't time for everything," he said, "and I'm specializing on selecting things I have a lasting enthusiasm for."

Minnie stared straight ahead. She experienced a sort of impact, as though an actual blow had been struck in the atmosphere. One of her strange blank moments enveloped her. Her mind was completely in abeyance. She only vaguely understood the purport of Cousin Jim's words; but she felt very near to something. It seems she must have made a comment or asked a question, for Cousin Jim was making reply.

"Oh, well," he was saying, "there's the whole universe to explore beyond what we see and touch."

He went on talking. She was not listening. Something about the millions of dollars' worth of things he actually owned. All she was sensible of was a feeling that refused to fall in ranks at command of her brain; the feeling of some desirable world she had left unexplored; the feeling of Cousin Jim's sureness and warmth and depth of happiness that somehow cast a spell upon the reason.

The moment was favourable to Minnie, but the fatal habit of years caused her to thrust it back. This was sheer fuzzy nonsense. It was not clear thinking. It wasn't practical. It was not what she had come for. She had in reality come to buy Cousin Jim, though that was not what she called it.

"Well, there must be *something* we can do!" she cried in an almost pettish reaction. "It isn't *right* with all our money, and you our only relative. Why can't you let me fix over this old house for you—as a Christmas present? I'd love to do it, and heaven knows it needs it badly enough. It's positively *shabby*."

Panic flared in Cousin Jim's gentle eyes, and he cast wildly about him for an expedient.

"No, no!" he cried, "I couldn't let you do that, Minnie. But I tell you; if you really want to give me a Christmas present——"

"Yes; what is it? I'd love to do it."

"The old Neemish Marsh where I hunt ducks has been bought out and turned into a duck club so rich and haughty that I couldn't even think of affording it. And I sort of like to hunt ducks."

"Oh, join it, at once! We'd be so glad to arrange it. You will, won't you, Cousin Jim?" she pleaded.

"I'll attend to it at once—and thank you, Minnie, for your thought of the old man."

He accompanied her to the car and watched her drive away, his eyes thoughtful.

IV

Minnie drove home satisfied for the moment. She had administered a drug to that buried stirring something within her, and the something was still. For the moment she had regained her poised self-possession. Again she was "thinking clearly" and with deadly precision. Unfortunately for her, Camilla was the first to come within the scope of this ruthless clarity of vision.

The ecstatic damsel had grown into a chirrupy middle age. Her face was older, her figure angular in spinster lines; but her enthusiasm, her intensity, and her point of view had not changed one mite. Minnie's dilettante activities had focussed into one impression: she was eternally sick of "dinky" things. Camilla was wholly concerned with, completely immersed in, was the apotheosis, the symbol of "dinky" things. Now at once on Minnie's return she burst out into "dinky" things.

"Oh, Minnie, Martin has been here while you have been away, and he thinks he has got track of an oriental rug that will tone in exactly with the second landing. He took the measurements. And when you get time I want to show you just how that scheme we talked over for the East room would work out: I've been thinking about it. Oh, yes; in the mail this morning was a letter from Mrs. Compton telling about a perfectly wonderful East Indian Swami. She says he's marvellous; and don't you think we ought to have him? Everybody's crazy about him in New York, she says. We know so little about all those Eastern things: and nobody has done it here before; and she enclosed a sort of circular about him that has a picture of him; and he's the best *looking* thing you ever saw, with long robes and a turban. He'd be stunning in the East room; or we might have a set made for the stage. Anyway, Mrs. Compton wrote. And here's a clipping from the New York *Herald* I thought you might like to see. It's quite good——"

Minnie glanced at the clipping indifferently. It was one of the Sunday supplement things, featuring the estate at Burton Lake and its "beautiful chatelaine." Camilla chattered on eagerly. Minnie felt irritated. That had occurred lately with

increasing frequency. Suddenly she stopped short in her tracks with an exclamation.

"What is it?" Camilla interrupted herself.

"Nothing," replied Minnie shortly.

But she had had one of her flashes of illumination. She thought she had discovered the real reason for her increasing irritations against Camilla. Camilla had not moved forward one inch from the time she had helped prepare for the famous cotillion to celebrate Freeman's arrival so many years ago. Her never-tiring intense interest and enthusiasm were exactly what they had both experienced when Minnie had first come into the novelty of her possessions. Camilla constantly dragged her back to things she had accepted and forgotten and ceased to occupy herself with. She saw reflected in Camilla her old self; as a disembodied spirit might see his corporeal being; and the revelation was disquieting, disturbing, irritating. That would never do!

She resumed her stride, her active mind busy on a brand-new determination: she must get rid of Camilla, painlessly if possible.

By the time she had reached her apartments she had found the answer. It was through the usual solvent of wealth.

"Sit down, Camilla," she said, "I've been thinking over a little plan. You have been with me a good many years; and did you ever stop to think that you have never had a vacation?"

"But, Minnie darling!" cried Camilla, "that's so absurd! I've been with you everywhere!"

"That is not quite the same thing. You have been very faithful; and you deserve something quite of your own. What I propose is this: you have always been interested in the Orient, but neither Fred nor I have ever felt we could go so far away. You and Aline Campbell"—naming a youthfully middle-aged but impecunious friend of Camilla's—"are to make a tour there—oh, a real tour—of at least a year. Visit all the East, and India—a tour around the world. I will pay all the expenses of both, of course."

"Oh, Minnie!" cried Camilla, for once at a loss for words. "It's too much—I couldn't—I wouldn't leave you so long. It would be an *enormous* expense——"

Minnie cut her short with almost savage brusqueness.

"It's settled," she said. "That's the way it's going to be. Go and talk to Aline."

Camilla thought her brusqueness of manner was because she

did not wish to be thanked, and adored her for it. As a matter of fact, it was because something almost uncontrollable rose suddenly in Minnie that could not brook even conventional opposition.

"Go and talk to Aline," she repeated.

She had dumped Camilla; the way they always do when they get through with any one.

v

With this final gesture Minnie settled into life. Disillusion, boredom, restless activity—all the rest of it—were part of life and to be accepted. Why struggle? But since any one must have at least one real interest, however small or however remote, or perish utterly; and since Minnie's vitality, though frustrated and checked, was as strong as ever; Zozo once more moves to the front as the centre of our story. On him Minnie fastened the hopes, the strength, the passion of her whole nature. In him she saw herself projected, as it were. In him she visualized a fulness of life that she had not found in herself.

CHAPTER LV

I

THIS was not an inappropriate moment for such a recentring of life in the next generation; for the next generation—all of it that counted in Minnie's, and indeed in Fred's eyes—was on the eve of entering college!

Long ago Fred and Minnie had agreed that the decision as to what institution was to be honoured should be left entirely to Zozo. Fred did not care where he went. Indeed, if any one had happened to have Fred's deepest confidence in the matter, he would have discovered that Fred did not much care whether the precious youth went to any college. Fred had never felt acutely his own lack of a higher education. Minnie, on the other hand, was strong for what she thought was the prestige of either Yale, Princeton, or Harvard. She had no deciding choice among these; but it never occurred to her that any one of Zozo's resplendent station should not select one of the three. Therefore, she was dismayed when Zozo announced his preference for the state institution.

She used all the arguments and influence she possessed, but without shaking the youth's stolid decision. If it had not been for Fred she might have invoked authority.

"No," said Fred, "we agreed to let him do his own choosing and we'll stick to it."

"But he hasn't a single reason to give," Minnie expostulated. "He just says he 'likes it better.'"

"Well, the State University is a fine school."

"But the associations—and the prestige!"

"After all, it's Zozo who is going."

"But he cannot know what is best for him. The associations one makes in college last all one's life."

"I don't gather that the university is entirely populated by criminals," said Fred drily.

Minnie gave that up. In a moment Fred would be talking

about what Minnie symbolically designated his "barefoot days." He had very little perspective in such matters.

"I still think he's too immature to decide such things for himself," said she. "He needs firm guidance."

"Maybe he's had firm guidance enough," replied Fred with unexpected insight. "Zozo can't explain himself very well, but he probably has his reasons."

In time Minnie became partly though never wholly reconciled. She discovered that the scions of a number of other "good families" were enrolled; she savoured some comfort in what she discovered was the very high standing of some of the professors.

Fred was right: Zozo had his reasons, though they were largely instinctive in their origin. Boiled down they amounted to the fact that Zozo was afraid of the Eastern colleges. The state institution was nearer home, and it had not that tremendous prestige to live up to. Sort of the difference between shirt sleeves and evening dress, in a way.

It was only another manifestation of something basic. Zozo had little part in the life of his own class, even at home. He much preferred the society of the people of the back streets; not from any taste for "low company," as the saying is, but merely because he felt easier with them. Nor was it a desire to show off. He was, to do him justice, not purse-proud. The actual money side did not interest him much. He was a bit close; but was a good spender when it came to certain things. Paradoxically, though shy and self-contained, he must always have someone with him; he had no dependence on himself, no desire just to go out and do things. There were no grooves of particular interest in his brain. Consequently, he acquired a lot of "low" friends with whom he much consorted in a half-clandestine sort of way. He liked to do them well, and it pleased him to be lavish with them, to impress them as a "spender." He felt comfortably brainy with them, too, a dashing brilliant man of the world—everything he was not among his peers.

That was one instinctive basis for his decision. The other was even more obscure, but none the less real. The state institution was nearer home.

This did not mean that Zozo required the proximity of his own fireside: far from it! But one thing he had absorbed thoroughly, and that was the idea of special privilege. He was a selected being who was entitled to take more and give less than the due

proportion simply because his family supported half the charities in the state and owned more things than any other six families. He sought for no logic in this; he merely accepted it. And his deep-hidden instinct of wisdom told him that it would be easier to get into the state institution where the name of Kirby was known and mighty than into the distant old colleges where it was unknown. He did not argue that out to himself either; he just felt it.

II

So the state institution it was. Zozo's instincts had been correct. There was no "favouritism," but the coldly impersonal element was withdrawn. Mr. Harmon did not, of course, get copies of the questions that were to be asked at the entrance examination, but he was able to procure copies of past examinations, and so could concentrate his fire on probabilities instead of all over the map. There is in the marking of papers a certain legitimate latitude of personal judgment; and it is not to be supposed that this would be exercised against the son of a man who had so recently endowed the Chair of Physics, and who might conceivably endow something else. There is a legal maxim that one must give a criminal the benefit of the doubt. Zozo's examination papers could quite well be viewed as crimes. However, he was on the list of those passed. He was, of course, no Abouben-Adhem, and he had four conditions, but he made it!

Zozo and Mr. Harmon followed their telegram of triumph home to receive congratulations which a growing uneasiness made fervid. The conditions were not at first mentioned. Minnie was relieved; Fred was much pleased.

"Now that's something like," he said heartily.

He went farther in marking the occasion. Zozo's car was returned to him.

"I think you've learned your lesson, my son," said he, "and I think you're old enough now to stand on your own feet. I'm not going to say anything about careful driving, except to remind you that now in a way I'm responsible. You have to think of me as well as yourself—and others."

Nobody thought to reward Mr. Harmon. But then, performers of miracles rarely are rewarded.

There remained the three months of the summer—and those four conditions. The latter were a bit of an anti-climax when

they became known. But, then, most boys had conditions, Minnie argued; meaning most boys of whose social standing she approved. She decided to sacrifice her plans and go to a quiet place in the mountains where Zozo's mind would not be distracted from his studies. Mr. Harmon was given delicately to understand what he already fully appreciated—that he had a deuce of a job on his hands.

CHAPTER LVI

I

DURING the summer, while Minnie and Zozo were in the mountains attending to those conditions, Fred really had a pretty good time, all things considered. At least it was a more comfortable time. He had the whole place to himself, and he could do as he pleased in it without the fear of successful contradiction. His hours, outside the office, were regulated by no social logic and governed by little social obligation. And it was restful to prowling boldly by the darkened apartments where erstwhile feverish activities clamoured after his furtive passage.

After office hours he clambered into his roadster quite free to go where he would. It was no longer necessary to visit Cousin Jim semi-secretly. There were no "people in to tea, and I do hope you'll make an especial effort to get home." He told himself constantly that he missed his family cruelly but, if it could have been analysed, that was more in the nature of an auto-suggestion than a statement of fact.

II

He played a little golf at times, and he dropped in on people to say hullo, and he went out to a few small dinners in the old informal fashion. But chiefly he spent his scant leisure with that old reprobate, Cousin Jim. The two men seemed to have found each other as if for the first time.

The summer fishing was at its height just now and Cousin Jim, when not off wading some stream, was generally engaged in tying flies. He had evolved several patterns of his own which seemed to be especially adapted to the local waters, and as these could not be purchased, he good-naturedly tied a great many of them for his friends. The centre table had been cleared of its mess of papers, books, pipes, tobacco jars, and like miscellaneous litter, and was now covered with feathers, hooks, gut, wax, silk threads, and small tools. Cousin Jim perched gold-rimmed spectacles on

his nose, lighted a pipe, and became absorbed in the delicate and accurate craftsmanship. Apparently he spoke abstractedly, always, off the corner of his mind as it were; and yet they had some quite good talks.

Fred lay on the couch with the setter, or walked about restlessly, or sprawled in an easy chair and smoked, or perched on the edge of the table watching Cousin Jim's deft hands. At first he thought he would like to tie flies, too; and made the attempt. His blunt thick fingers were clumsy. Cousin Jim said he thought the flies might do for bull frogs; and encouraged him to believe that with a little more practice he might perfect a fly that would deceive an inexperienced piece of sticky flypaper. So Fred quit the fly business. But he liked the atmosphere and the talks, and he actually knocked off work a half-hour early, on the days when Cousin Jim was not fishing, in order to have more time with the old man.

III

It was of an afternoon when Fred had not prowled around, nor sat on the edge of the table, nor even sprawled in the leather chair. He had flopped down on the sofa; and when as usual the setter had suggested that he move over and give a fellow room, he had not stirred. Cousin Jim worked away on his flies for a few moments in silence.

"Fred," said he at last, "I'm going to ask you a simple question. Are you happy?"

Fred started a little and opened his eyes.

"Why do you ask that?" he countered.

"Because I want to know."

Fred considered.

"Why, I suppose I'm as happy as most men. Why shouldn't I be?"

"Why shouldn't you be happier than most men?"

"What do you mean—happy?" asked Fred, sensibly.

It was Cousin Jim's turn to hesitate.

"I could give you philosophic definitions," he said finally, "but I won't. I'll tell you a symptom or so and an indication or so, and you can see if it fits."

"Shoot," said Fred.

"If you're happy, you ought to be glad that you're alive, for one thing. You ought to be keenly interested in what is going to

happen to-morrow even if you're only moderately satisfied with what has happened to-day. You ought to feel full of energy—I guess that's the most prominent symptom. There's an Energy of Happiness—when it's the real thing."

"Then I'm not happy," said Fred, briefly.

"I was afraid not; too bad."

They fell silent for a while.

"How in hell do you expect a man to feel full of energy when he's overworked all the time?" spoke up Fred with a note of resentment.

"If he's happy he isn't overworked—that is, if he gets his food and sleep."

"Oh, shucks!" exclaimed Fred, "you're chasing your tail in a circle."

"Maybe," said Cousin Jim.

He went on with his work. But Fred could not let the matter rest so.

"How could I do anything different?" he complained. "What do I do wrong? Where can you find any one better off? Haven't I got everything any reasonable man requires?"

"I expect so, Fred," said Cousin Jim placably.

But Fred was for some strange reason fully roused. He made a counter attack.

"Well, how about you, confound you! Are you happy?"

Cousin Jim apparently considered this worth discussion. He laid aside his work and removed the gold-rimmed spectacles.

"That I can't say just yet. But I can say this, I believe I've got together all the ingredients."

"Ingredients?"

"Yes; the ingredients of happiness. Same as getting together the ingredients of a loaf of bread. Your salt and your flour and your water and your fire and your yeast may be perfectly good salt and flour and water and fire and yeast, but they aren't bread until you combine them. Same way with life, or success, or happiness—whatever you want to call it—they're all the same really."

He filled his pipe afresh and puffed strongly on it.

"By golly!" said he, "the more I live the more I respect that word *proportion*. It's darn near the whole works, if you come right down to brass tacks. If anything gets out of proportion, it's lop-sided, and it's wrong, and it makes trouble. I'm beginning to believe that's where *all* the trouble comes from. Things

themselves are all right. I don't believe you could name a single material thing in the universe, or a single human motive either, that isn't not only good but necessary in its proper proportion. I've thought about it a lot, and I believe that's so. There is no intrinsic evil."

"I don't believe you, not for one holy minute," said Fred, "but I know better than to argue with you. You'd tie me up in bow knots. You're wrong; but go ahead."

"I'm right; and I intend to go ahead. You've not only got to get your ingredients together, but you've got to know their proportions. Too much salt will spoil your bread. Same way, as I said, with happiness."

"What are the ingredients of happiness?" demanded Fred.

"Platitudes," replied Cousin Jim, unexpectedly. "If you want an official list of them you can get it from the Reverend Jenkins. Won't do you any good though. Got to find them for yourself. Dog-gone hard job. Took me years."

Fred stirred restlessly.

"You see it's this way, Fred: all the great truths that make up life have been discovered and stated again and again. There is no new revelation. If I should tell you what I have found to be the ingredients of happiness, you'd accuse me, as I said, of talking the most shopworn platitudes. The statement of each of them has been made; but it is a statement only, not the thing itself. The statement is valuable only as an item on a list is valuable; it enables us to recognize what we've got after we've got it. Intellectual acknowledgment merely is no good—that's formalism. You start out and you make a long journey and you find yourself back at your identical starting point. But that starting point, while the same, is no longer as it was. The long journey, somehow, has changed it. It is no longer a platitude; it is an ingredient. That's because you no longer merely understand it with your mind; you understand it with your heart. Darn hard job; lots of travel."

He threw out his hands with a helpless gesture, as though despairing of coherence; then drew them back again as if in fresh resolve to try anyhow.

"We haven't all got the same leisure that you have, Jim," said Fred.

"Some travel best in contemplation; some in activity," said Cousin Jim.

For a fleeting instant Fred had felt that he had almost glimpsed what Cousin Jim was driving at. But the impression—it was only an impression—immediately faded.

"I must say you're as clear as ditchwater and as helpful as a pocket in a shirt," he grumbled.

"I know it," sighed Cousin Jim. "There ought to be some way—some starting point. It's development; and that seems to be a personal matter, somehow. I suppose it ought not to be. There have been teachers. Their function seems to have been, as I make it, the supplying of new handles by which men can take hold of the same old things: that's about all. Or perhaps I should say they have been able to indicate new ways to make a start. That's the difficulty: making the start. Once a person makes a start, by hook or crook, he's bound to go on. It's a matter of *awareness*. I used to call it 'awakening consciousness' when I talked to old Mr. Kirby. We are all blind, deaf, and dumb to too many things both inside us and outside us. The whole of life is how to make people *aware*. When they become really aware, then they *must* act, for their own satisfaction. And that action brings development."

Fred, who was at least receiving refreshment if not edification, grinned at him mockingly.

"I suppose that's one of your ingredients," said he. "Trot out another. Trot out the biggest He-Ingredient of the menagerie."

Cousin Jim arose to his full height and stretched out a long forefinger. He had dropped his half-bantering air.

"A working belief in continuity, not only of life after death, but also of work after death—and progress and development," said he.

"Immortality," rejoined Fred briefly, "most people believe in immortality."

"I said a *working* belief. Most people believe in immortality—as a platitude. But it's not *used*. It's laid away for the future. It isn't a principle of living now—like keeping warm. It isn't an *influence*."

He kicked the fire, reprimanded the setter dog, and returned to face Fred.

"Look here, Fred," he continued, "suppose you *knew*, actually *knew*, that whatever you did here built up your powers there, the way exercise builds up your muscles. Not just the big things—every little act, or decision, or considered thought even. That's

what I mean by a *working* belief. And suppose what you *didn't* do here—what you avoided or postponed or were too lazy for, or sidestepped—suppose that had to be done some time or other.”

He moved closer until he stood fairly over Fred's prostrate form.

“And now suppose this—suppose it clearly—that those things that you don't do now, when they ought to be done, bear compound interest until they are done. Wouldn't that add a new significance to every moment of your life here? That's what I mean by a *working* faith.”

“It's tremendous—and rather awful,” said Fred.

“It's only one ingredient,” said Cousin Jim, turning away. “Only one. There are others which take the awfulness out. If there were not, that faith would not be happiness. Happiness is not awful. It is up-springing and joyous and abounding. But the tremendousness remains. That is part of happiness, too.”

“If one believed that——” muttered Fred. “I admit it's reasonable—but——”

“I know,” supplied Cousin Jim a little sadly, “I know. It's just a platitude.”

IV

The inspirational glamour lasted just precisely as far as Cousin Jim's front gate. Then Fred came to his ordinary practical everyday self with a little laugh.

“Fine and dandy for *him* to gas!” he dismissed the subject. “Lot *he* has to worry about!” But as he neared home he added as corollary that nevertheless he liked it; it diverted him; it was so completely Cousin Jim-ey. And as he moved about for the next few days fragments of Cousin Jim's monologue kept recurring to him in random fugitive speculations that were not at all Fred-esque! It was all moonshine, of course—well, anyway, it was impractical; but it was interesting; it had been refreshment.

For a week neither of the men recurred to the more serious discussion. Then, after a particularly nagging day, it came up apparently of its own accord. Fred stopped the roadster before the little house in Maple Street, walked rather heavily up the path, and without ceremony pushed open the door. Cousin Jim was seated by the window reading a book so absorbedly that he seemed not to have heard the slight noise of Fred's entrance. The latter examined the old man for a moment, the deep-lined

kindly face, the young eyes. There was something pathetic—no, not pathetic, *appealing* about him; something whose influence expanded the heart by its mere existence and proximity.

"Hullo, Jim," said Fred after a few moments, "what's the trouble with the world to-day?"

Cousin Jim looked at him gravely over his spectacles.

"Us rich men are too overworked, that's one of them," he replied after a moment. "Sit down, Fred, and think of all the things you could do if you didn't have to spend your money showing how rich you are. How are the alterations coming on? Have the gold bricks for the new court arrived yet?"

"Great snakes, I wish you'd shut up on that topic. I'm woozy-headed going over bills. What a way to spend your days! Honest, Jim, there are bills for gimcracks I don't even know the use of and I don't even know where they are!"

"Think of all the poor artisans they give employment to," giped Cousin Jim.

"It doesn't give me the sort of employment I like—or am fitted for!" complained Fred, "when I get through my mind feels like a roaring rapids." He had not intended to complain or to become serious; but the conversation, with a rush, seemed to have run away with itself.

"Cheer up! cheer up!" consoled Cousin Jim. "I don't doubt it will all be done some day, and then you can settle down and reflect the magnificence of it all in a millpond mind, if you want to."

"Jim," said Fred earnestly, "I could punch your head for you! That's the point. I'm rushing like hell, and I don't know where I'm rushing to. I can't see any plan for future work. I can't even see clearly what kind of a doddering idiot I'm getting to be. All I know is that I'm damn sick of it all!"

"You'll get used to it in time," Cousin Jim predicted. "And, Fred, with your type of manly beauty you're going to take a fine photograph in the act of laying cornerstones and dedicating things and being godfather and stepfather and foster mother to things. I think I'll start an album of them for Zozo."

"Ho-hum!" Fred stretched himself. "If I hadn't lost all my ginger I'd throw you out that window, Jim, you old stingaree, you!"

He stared out the window for a few moments in silence.

"You remember what you were saying the other day?" he broke

out abruptly, "—about the ingredients of happiness? I've been thinking about it off and on since. It's interesting, but I didn't quite get it. I wish you'd tell me more clearly just what you were driving at."

"Well, Fred, so do I. But I can't. Getting things over takes training, I guess, and I haven't got it, and neither have you. I tried the other day to tell you a little, but without much luck."

"Well, I got a drift. Do you know, I have moments of almost human intelligence."

Cousin Jim smoked perplexedly for a few moments.

"It's clear enough to me—or I thought it was. But I don't know where to begin—or what to say. And probably you'll shy like a horse at it. And maybe you'll laugh. But I *mean* it, Fred."

"If you do, Jim, I can stand it," Fred told him soberly, "though I may not *understand* it."

"It's no good telling you more ingredients of happiness," said Cousin Jim. "But I do know where we're all headed wrong. It's a commonplace you hear from every pulpit and see in the 'moral' columns of every newspaper that the world we are living in is too material. I don't believe that. This world can't be too material. That's the kind of a world it is."

Fred pricked up his ears.

"Now you're shouting!" he agreed heartily.

"They've got the cart before the horse. The real point is that the world is too little spiritual. Spiritual is a rotten word; it's been abused until it has a sort of sickly meaning to it; but it's all we've got. It stands really for the intangibles as distinct from the tangibles. In my notion we are not smothered in materialism, as they're always calling it. We should get and develop all the material progress we possibly can. It's a good thing: it's what the world is for."

"You're tooting right it is!" Fred endorsed this.

"But there's got to be a proportion; a balanced ration. Something like a chemical formula, H_2O —two parts of the spiritual to one of the material, as you might say. As soon as your proportions get wrong, everything gets wrong. That's why I say we haven't too much material progress, but we haven't enough spiritual progress to go with it. We are spiritually provincial."

"Well," observed Fred, with mock wonder, "do you know, strange as it may seem, my feeble Chinese intellect has followed

your argument this far perfectly. Indeed, I'm willing to agree on principle. How do you balance things?—go to church?"

"Evidently not," replied Cousin Jim drily. "That's where that darn word 'spiritual' throws you off the track. It sounds churchy; and you go maundering off to seventh days being holy and all the rest of it, until you're nowhere practical. It really means actual inner growth of each individual. That's what's needed—that brings us back to the ingredients of happiness again," added Cousin Jim.

"There's a good idea in that, too," said Fred at length. "But how to do? Do you know, Jim, you remind me a lot of an 'answers to correspondents' I saw the other day in one of these women's magazines that Minnie takes. Some poor chump wrote an agony letter telling how shy he was and how rattled he got entering a ballroom, and wanted the editor to tell him what to do. What do you suppose was the answer?"

"I don't know," said Cousin Jim.

"Assume an easy and graceful demeanour," quoted Fred with an explosion of laughter. "What do you think of that? I agree: all you've got to do is to do some 'actual inner growth,' and the answer to that is just to go ahead and grow, I presume."

"It ought to be statable: it's really a spiritual hygiene, isn't it?" mused Cousin Jim.

This word unexpectedly touched a spring in Fred and caused him to sit up.

"When you say the word 'hygiene' you've got me winging," he cried, "don't do it! I can't hear that word without a qualm in the pit of my check book. Good Lord! I've been hygiened to death lately, Jim, on pyorrhœa and diarrhœa and every other kind of an orrhœa, and I'm sick of it. It's getting so my bodily organs are getting to be nothing but expensive luxuries. These specialists have had meters on them worse than those of the Gas and Electric Company; and they all register high. I bet I've paid a hundred dollars an ounce for my blood pressure. I'm going to quit and let the old machine run for a while. I'm going to leave it some day anyhow; and right now I'm going to forget it for a change."

"That's a good idea," said Cousin Jim. "All right, I'll withdraw the word hygiene. But just the same, I stick to my guns. We are bred of generations of people recognizing physical laws! Now we are ready for something else!"

Fred contemplated him. What a lovable old codger he was—and impractical!

"Perhaps you are right about this thing you think you've got, Jim," he said soberly; but could not forbear adding, "whatever in thunder it is. I hope you are. But taking me as an ordinary sample citizen, you are too far up in the air. If your lectures, or however you would impart this 'hygiene' of yours when you get it, are to be any good, people must listen to them. You'd say that yourself."

"Of course."

"Well, they simply won't do it. Take this pet idea of immortality of yours. I am reasonably certain of it, I acknowledge; but even so, how does it help me actually to produce anything here? I tell you, Jim"—Fred in his turn became earnest and extended the arresting forefinger—"I don't think any one is entitled to live who isn't putting *something* in the world for what he takes out! Now how do your fine fuzzy ideas buck up the ordinary man in his living here? You show him just that, and he'll listen to you in flocks. I've always had a strangle hold on one fact, and that is that only honest sweating effort has ever accomplished anything that I've ever seen. And ideas, no matter how pretty they may seem, that aren't backed up by an ability to demonstrate them, simply don't interest me. And that's the bald fact of the case. I'm afraid to monkey with them. They merely make me feel mushy and spineless right away, and I have to get back mighty sudden to something I can push on hard to convince myself I'm still a man!"

After this outburst he stretched his arms as though he felt better; but he did not look at Cousin Jim. He wondered if he had hurt him; but all Cousin Jim said for the moment was:

"Well, that is interesting."

They smoked in silence for some time. Cousin Jim kicked the fire.

"There's one thing you've got that is mighty valuable, Fred," he said finally. "It is one of the biggest things in the universe—energy in control. And it isn't energy bought with your confounded money, either; it's all your own." He mused by himself, "Great stuff on which——" He broke off and lapsed into a brown study.

Fred eyed him with lazy amusement.

"Got the old boy!" he reflected.

But Cousin Jim aroused himself with a sigh.

"All right," he conceded. "Go ahead and pound the stuffing out of the business world, if that satisfies you. But when you've beaten it and got it to eating out of your hand, what then? You're not so dog-gone satisfied right now; and you needn't pretend you are. And that's what's the matter with you: you are asking yourself 'what then?'"

Fred arose and began to pace the floor.

"I tell you, Fred," he insisted doggedly, "your energy has got to be hitched to something bigger than yourself before you can be satisfied that you're a whole man. What are you getting out of life right now; answer me that! There's your business. You've produced a lot of things that people want, yes. And eventually all those things will be used up or burned up or thrown on the dump heap, extinct for ever. And there's your money. It's cut quite a swath around you, hasn't it? I can't for the life of me figure that out, so we'll leave it. Now what about it all? What about it fifty or a hundred years from now? What is going to remain of what you call 'productive'?"

Fred tried to interrupt, but Cousin Jim held up his hand.

"I'm trying to get at something: be patient. We are both after the same thing, Fred. Just give me a chance and I'll show you what I mean."

Fred subsided.

"What kind of things *do* remain and go on expanding? That's the question I've been asking myself for the last thirty years. And that's what this particular lazy old loafer has been working like a ditch-digger to answer. The foreground of life isn't good enough for me. I've got to see the whole scheme—or at least enough of it to give proof of the dignity of life."

"Well," observed Fred, "I must say one life is about as much as I can handle at a time."

"That's just it!" cried Cousin Jim, excited. "It *is* all one life! You are accumulating an outfit as a voyager in eternity after a good fat grubstake here! What's your standard of the things you select for your outfit? Once you start to thinking about that, you know, it makes a tremendous difference. I have been working so hard deciding what I want that I haven't had time to go after it," he said rather ruefully. "And, Fred, you have been so busy going after it, that you haven't noticed where you were going. That's the difference between us."

He paused; but Fred said nothing.

"Don't you see what I am getting at?" pleaded Cousin Jim. "If you really and *vigorously* believed what you say you are 'reasonably certain of'—this 'fine fuzzy idea' of immortality, as you called it—that would be a great measuring stick as to what you garnered out of this life to keep."

There ensued a longer pause. It had fallen quite dusk in the room. Bands of smoke hung suspended as though in the spell of a great portent. Almost visibly the two men welded together in life's experience. Fred arose to go.

"You're a hypnotic old devil, Jim," he muttered. "G' bye." He left more brusquely than usual.

V

The summer moved slowly by. These "serious talks," as Fred would have called them, were not often repeated. If he had thought that Cousin Jim was trying to hammer anything into him he would have shut up like a clam. On the contrary, Cousin Jim seemed to like to have him around as a mark at which to shoot whimsical frivolity. The two men cronied about like boys, which was very undignified for a Financial Magnate and one of Cousin Jim's mature years.

Once they even went fishing together. Cousin Jim suggested it and Fred was finally shamed into sparing the time. He arrived at the appointed early hour and honked his horn outside Cousin Jim's house. Cousin Jim came out and looked him over. He disapproved.

"Fred," said he, "you make me tired. Don't you know better than to wear a ball gown out fishing?"

Fred looked down at his smart homespun knickerbocker suit shamefacedly.

"All I got," he said briefly. "All my old hunting duds were put in the ragbag long ago. These things are all right: I don't care if I spoil them."

"Neither do I," Cousin Jim agreed to this sentiment, "but I won't be seen out fishing with a dude. You get out of that car and come in with me."

Fred meekly obeyed. Cousin Jim threw open a closet door and rummaged inside, from time to time casting treasure trove into the room behind him.

"There," said he at last, "I guess you can get them on. Those

pants were built big to hold lots of wool underclothes for duck hunting: I reckon you can get them on. That canvas coat is built loose, anyhow. She's a fine coat. She's my pa'tridge coat—that's what makes the blood stains around the skirts. Here's a good hat," he concluded, producing a disreputable old felt. "Now get into them and look halfway *decent*."

Fred obeyed, and Cousin Jim surveyed him critically.

"That's better," he approved. "Now here's your pole."

"I have a good rod in the car."

"Too good. I didn't say rod; I said *pole*. This'll do you."

"You can't cast with that thing!" cried Fred, aghast, as he handled the clumsy bamboo. "That's no rig for trout."

Cousin Jim looked at him disgustedly.

"Don't you suppose I know that? Who gave you any license to think you could fish for trout?" He held up a long forefinger.

"Now I don't want any nonsense out of you. You'll obey orders. This excursion is mine, and you're going to do as I say. You're getting too dang cocky. To-day is going to be devoted to humbling your proud spirit, my son. The trout is a noble fish. Everybody isn't fit to catch a trout. Only rich fellers like me. He's too good for you, same as that knee-pants fishing suit is too good for you. Bull-heads is about your size; and bull-heads you're going to fish for. Up by the dam. You come along."

"The car is out front," observed Fred, as Cousin Jim started for the back door.

"Well, you go out and get it and drive it into my back yard. It'll be safe there."

"Aren't we going in the car?"

"We are not. We're going with my horse and buggy. Where did the likes of you get any license to go fishing in a car? Why, dog-gone you, you haven't been fishing for fifteen years, to my certain knowledge. If you ever *were* a fisherman your patent ran out long ago! You got to start all over again, my son; right from the beginning. By rights I ought to make you go barefoot and fish with a bent pin."

In this spirit they drove solemnly up past town to the old dam and fished for bull-heads in the company of a number of small boys. The sun was warm and grateful; the air was full of buzzing insects. They jogged home after sunset behind the old gray horse. Fred had not slept so well for months as he did that night.

VI

But the lift was only temporary: it could be only temporary. Work pressed as hard as ever; and now the first of September was near at hand, which would bring the return with Minnie of all the old wearisome life that was to Fred in final analysis so aimless. Yet unknown to him something was slowly happening. It had not yet come to the surface of consciousness, it was not yet recognized or recognizable, but it was on the way. Something big and primal was seeking a way out. He saw in his association with Cousin Jim only amusement, refreshment, congenial human companionship, and a little entertaining, impractical, visionary talk of a more serious nature.

But, as a matter of fact, these two men represented complementary forces. They met and opposed each other in argument, permeated each other by association. Should their so diverse qualities ever fuse, their divergent needs find the same outlet, progress must be born. Indeed, thus are accomplished the purposes of harmony in spite of man's inadequacies of individual development. Through clouds of tobacco smoke, under the spell of the twilight hour, unseen adjustments of values were made. Gradually the infusion was taking place in the secret laboratories of the finer substance.

VII

Minnie and Zozo were to return in two days' time. Fred told himself he was looking forward to seeing them with the anticipation born of a long separation. Nevertheless, all of a sudden, he was again feeling very tired. His loyal soul never thought of any connection between the two facts—would have repudiated the thought indignantly. Nevertheless, it was there.

And that afternoon Fred was to have the first fantastic adventure of his life. It was fantastic not because of anything that actually happened—he merely fell into a refreshing sleep after a very short talk with Cousin Jim—but because, try as he would, his clear, common, practical world-sense was unable afterward to sweep from his mind the last wisp of awe and doubt as to what were and what were not realities. Subjectively Fred had a "weird" experience—as most of us do at one time or another. And it continued to him just a trifle "weird" even after his daylight commonsense had hooted it out of court.

It started with Fred's complaint to Cousin Jim after he had flung himself on the old sofa.

"Well," said Cousin Jim, "I know how you feel. I've felt that way myself. But when I get myself thoroughly poisoned with indigestible life that way you have I just make it a practice of putting one side my body to rest and recuperate by itself, and I go occupy a better one than I keep for the purpose."

"Beautifully simple treatment, Jim!" giped Fred. "Just like that!"

A ripple of amusement crossed his tired brain. His old, boyish, idle play-sense rose to the surface. The robust, practical, busy, rejective commonsense of his ordinary mind was in abeyance for the moment. He toyed idly with the fancy. It was a grand idea! Like having a prehensile tail, for instance, to hold things while you worked on them with both hands. How handy a spare body like that would be, a fresh and rested body that one could put on like another suit of clothes while the old one was aired and brushed and cleaned and freshened up. Might pick it out, like clothes. It ought to be a jolly and loose-fitting and undamageable body in that case. Do anything you want in it without being afraid to spoil it. If you wanted to sleep in it, why sleep; and if you wanted to swim in it, swim—like the dog there next him. Another ripple of amusement. His eyes slowly drooped. Funny delusion! After they had closed he seemed to get a picture of the strangely intent figure of Cousin Jim leaning forward watching him from the chair he had placed alongside!

His being seemed to float in a kind of daze. It shifted—the last umbilical tension gave way——

—What a comfortable world! room for everybody, and everybody jolly good friends. Come on! let's do something; no use sitting around! Too full of energy!—How silly to worry about anything!—He experienced a great rich tingling of sensation; something strange and undefinable, between sound and colour.—An expanding wave of emotion drew him on, as one follows, follows the vibrations of a temple gong——

Cousin Jim relaxed in his chair with a smile, almost a chuckle of satisfaction. The dog snored. Fred seemed dimly aware of these things. The magic of sleep was performed.

He awoke suddenly with an exalted tingling sensation, taking astonished cognizance of the boyish feeling of vigour which possessed him, a vigour to which he had long been a stranger. He

leaped from the sofa, smote Cousin Jim a resounding smack on the shoulders, and departed whistling.

As the gate clicked behind him he stopped and looked about him bewildered as though in reality he had but that moment awakened. The blighting negations rushed in on him, reasserted themselves, denying the higher possibilities, obstinately loyal to the race's restricting book-knowledge of life. His mind reasserted itself. For a brief hypnotic moment he had almost felt that Cousin Jim had actually managed in some fashion to put him in that other body, that play body like the extra suit of clothes! How absurd! He shook his shoulders, laughed at himself, and walked on. But he no longer whistled.

VIII

One more day! Before what? Why, the joy of greeting his wife and boy, of course! What could be more joyous? Yet Fred felt weighed down.

He went around to Cousin Jim's early that last afternoon. To-morrow the palace would awaken from the half-life it had led when Fred alone inhabited it. Old obligations and duties would quicken from their sleep. These comfortable, customary visits to Cousin Jim would have to be fewer and shorter. He was preoccupied with this, and with other vaguer things stirring within him. Barely he replied to Cousin Jim's greeting.

"I wish I could scare up more *interest* in this thing!" he broke out suddenly after several moments' silence. "Life, I mean," he added.

Cousin Jim considered.

"I wish you could. How about that old scheme of yours—the standardized housekeeping equipment idea. Are you going on with that when you get squared around?"

Fred looked at him curiously.

"I have been thinking about that," he replied after a hesitation. "I don't know just why, but the idea doesn't seem to get much action with me lately." He hesitated again, a little embarrassed. "It isn't that I've slumped because I no longer need to make the money—you know that"—looking pleadingly toward the other—"but, darn it, a lot of your fool talk has got me going. It's just that the world all of a sudden seems so *stuffed* with things, I'm wondering if it needs any more."

Cousin Jim whistled, but said nothing.

"Sometimes I'm ashamed of myself," Fred continued, "—the whole game—I've always played it so. Oh, I don't know! It gives me indigestion to think of it! I'm ashamed of myself, too," he repeated rather pathetically. "It isn't that I don't need the money any more: you know that," he said again, hoping for a reply.

Cousin Jim merely smoked and looked expectant. He had a way of keeping a silence that expressed sympathetic interest.

"I don't know what the trouble is," Fred went on. "I never was a dub before; but I'm more upset in my mind than any one knows because of this wabby lack of decision."

"Well," remarked Cousin Jim, removing his pipe, "I understand, I think. Your trouble is you've got growing pains. You've been too busy before to look at things in general. Now you're beginning to. You see there's always going to be lots of people to do the feeding and clothing and furnishing of the world for the profit there is in it. No need to worry about that. But there's always mighty few to look things over and see what other kind of food the world needs—*mighty* few with talent and leisure of heart to take a broad look. That's a General's work, you see. That's what the country needs. You have a big chance there, Fred."

"Oh, I suppose so," said Fred, dispirited immediately the familiar subject of his great opportunities was touched. He was sick and tired hearing about that.

"If I could only get away for a rest!" he sighed after a moment.

Cousin Jim took this up.

"Well, that depends on what you mean by the word *rest*. As far as the mere physical side of being *tired* is concerned, a few good nights' sleep and a little exercise in the open air fixes up almost anybody, no matter what he's been doing. You don't really need to get away for a rest."

"What do I need then, in heaven's name?" cried Fred pettishly.

"Insulation. You make yourself a blotting paper for worry. Oh, I don't mean worry about whether business is going right—though that's part of it; or about Zozo; or anything particular. I mean just *worry*, a general attitude toward everything. Did you ever think about that?"

He paused, but Fred did not reply.

"You think you're all keyed up," resumed Cousin Jim.

"You're not; you're all keyed down. Trouble is, you're keeping house in the cellar. Move up! Move up into the observatory!"

"Jim," rejoined Fred impatiently, "that has a fine sound but it don't mean anything practical. You ought to have been a moral lecturer, and let your hair grow long, and go without shoes, and become an exhorter."

"Yeah? Maybe so. But if things go wrong, why not try something different? They're not altogether right as they are, are they? Enjoying your money?"

Fred stayed to supper with Cousin Jim and did not leave until late. He carried with him one phrase of the first exchange that afternoon. It lingered in the corridors of his memory. Cousin Jim had said that he was living in the cellar of his establishment. It was a vivid picture, that continued to haunt him; but he could not quite grasp its significance. Nevertheless, he stood by his car obsessed by a necessity to grasp its significance. Just what had the old codger meant by it? Something was stirring within him trying dumbly to explain what he had meant. Vaguely, away in the back of his consciousness, hovered a dim perception of other levels than these on which he lived, levels above and levels below; levels to which one might ascend—and levels to which one might fall! It was a momentary glimpse, instantly swept away before he could formulate it, leaving him only with a perplexed feeling that the solid ground beneath his feet had for an instant dissolved.

He looked up into the void he could see, the physical void above him in which glittered the stars. They were infinitely remote, infinitely alien, almost hostile in their withdrawn preoccupation. He felt numb and dumb, an underling in their presence, separated from any relation to the universe by the immensity of space. With a rush the infinities pressed on him.

Unable to contemplate it longer he wrenched his eyes away. He raised his arms above his head with a caged sigh, and stretched, slowly releasing every muscle as the breath left his lungs.

In that sigh he touched the lowest level of his life.

IX

The stretch of his muscles tingled and surged through his being. In their relaxation magic was at work. The exhalation made an inhalation necessary. He drew the air deeply into his chest.

And so intimately connected are the physical and the spiritual processes in our strange human organism, so strongly does the

manifestation of one depend upon and follow the other, that the simple bodily act at that ripened moment broke Fred's prison walls. It is always that way. The Moment is in itself insignificant—but the Moment must have been prepared.

The deep breath, and the surging hurrying blood, cracked, dissolved, swept away the crust. A new surface of consciousness arose, a surface capable of contemplating stars and his union with them. They were no longer alien. He was one with them. If he did not matter, why neither did they. If they signified, why so did he. He was a mere atom in the presence of their glorious galaxy, but so was each one of them a pin-point in the immensity through which it moved serene.—And their serenity should be his!

It was the new fresh surface exposed by the sweeping away of the old crust, still impressionable.—An inspirational moment of escape.—An uplift of joyous expansion and participation——

Again he raised his arms, but this time with an upleaping flame in his heart. An underling, yes; but an underling who realized all future kinship. *Part of it! Part of it all!*

He returned home softly, like a man who feared to awaken from a beautiful dream. At Burton Lake he slipped in by the little side door in order to avoid the servants. He went to bed softly, still bemused.

X

A great thing had happened to Fred, a thing long prepared, for which unconsciously he had made long preparation. It could have come to him only through that preparation. It could not have come to Minnie at all, for she had persisted on the bright surface of life and had not gone below blindly and patiently and loyally to grope in the darkness.

Yet like many other marked hours of eternity, it passed without recognition. Fred awakened the next morning apparently quite his customary self. He grinned a trifle shamefacedly at his "sentimentality," as he looked on it, of the night before, and busied his mind with what he must accomplish at the office before train time. The crust had reformed over the sensitive surface of response. The old Fred was back, the Fred incapable of looking at the night sky.

CHAPTER LVII

I

ZOZO and Mr. Harmon disappeared the first part of September, remained in the almost-empty little college town for a week, and returned. Mr. Harmon was looking rather wan. The official results could not be known for a week or so, but the tutor had private advices that Zozo had passed. Amid heartfelt jubilation the final preparations were hurried on for his departure. He must have an entire new fit-out, like a June bride. Zozo's chief concern was to tune his beloved car to its highest pitch, and to see that it was safely bestowed on the flat car. He would have preferred to drive; but the age of good roads was not yet, and it was thought best that he begin his academic career clean, whole, and on time. Then, too, Minnie was going along to start him off; and she had no fancy to be jounced.

Both Fred and Zozo, though from different motives, looked on this latter decision as a mistake; but their disapproval did not affect Minnie in any way. Of *course* she was going along.

The State University was even then large and fundamentally calm in spite of apparent contrary evidence of riot and rah-rah. It could absorb without a quiver some startling whales. Nevertheless, Zozo's advent was looked forward to with considerable interest. His two visits for the examinations had been marked by the "scouts" of the leading fraternities; and as his family was wealthy and prominent and he himself well dressed and of what was interpreted as "exclusive" appearance, he was slated for a "rush" as soon as he should appear. As for the faculty; his examination papers were the most weirdly improbable that had ever been submitted. They obviously represented conscientious and painstaking effort; they as obviously indicated a by no means stupid brain. But their final form argued either a wild imagination or exemplified the most extraordinary fortuitous concatenation of educational tags and labels ever assembled under one tent. Yes; he was certainly awaited with interest! Furthermore,

the exact train on which he was to arrive was also known. The fraternities in those days of free-for-all rushing jealously guarded the fiction that they stood aloof in academic dignity awaiting the humble unsolicited adoration of the freshman. The latter was supposed not to raise his thoughts in daring hope until the glad tidings were broken to him that he had been considered worthy to become a pledged member. Indeed, he generally understood that if he ever indicated in any way that he presumed himself worthy or desirous, that in itself was exceedingly likely to "queer" him. With the ingenuity of their mimetic years the fraternity men managed the outward appearance of this very well. But beneath the fair surface was keen and sometimes unscrupulous rivalry. Desirable but quite unsophisticated freshmen had actually, on one or two historic occasions, been taken directly from the train to a fraternity house, rushed off their feet all the evening, and pledged to one fraternity when they had thought all the time they were being pledged to another, to which their brothers and their uncles and their fathers had belonged even unto the third and fourth generation. And when they awakened to the true facts it was Too Late! For these ridiculous duels had beneath them a code of honour as high and absurd and ideal and inflexible as the old code of chivalry when you might legitimately rapier one unskilled in fence but you must not hit him with a chair. Once the pledge button was in the lapel of the coat, the freshman was joined for better or for worse until death did them part. Uncles and brothers and fathers might rave; the deluded freshman might secretly weep; but thenceforward he must to all outward appearance be a loyal Pi.

And on their side the fraternity brothers had their code. Steal men they might, but never by word, look, or sign did they derogate a rival or attempt to sway decision by invidious comparison.

Minnie was densely ignorant of men's college life in its finer details. Therefore, she was both surprised and pleased to find herself and Zozo met on the station platform by an extraordinarily polite, exquisitely groomed, and enormously solicitous group of well-favoured young men. Each of these youths was provided with a perfectly good excuse for being there. The uncle of one had met—and so much enjoyed—the Kirbys at Atlantic City year before last; and he had been importuned by the said uncle to do all in his power. Another had a letter of introduction. A third had, brazenly, merely a mutual friend. Minnie was pleased, not

only with this attention, but also with the appearance and deportment of these youths. There certainly was nothing rowdy or uncouth or unkempt about them; on the contrary, they had every appearance of good breeding, taste, wealth, and the utmost splendour both of raiment and of manner. Her opinion of the State University went up. Why not? These were the picked "rushers" of the whole show.

There was no haste, no confusion, no harsh words, no impertunity, no biting, kicking, scratching, or gouging. The elegance of the slow passage across the station platform was unmarred by a single hasty movement, a single evidence of anxiety or effort. Yet the psychic might have discerned the clash of steel on steel, the laboured breath of the combatants. Each manœuvred according to his skill, charm, luck, and experience. Minnie had no inkling, and did not know that when at last she settled herself in the tonneau of the red car instead of in the seats of one of the other half dozen standing empty, a battle had been fought and lost and won, nor that that simple act decided one important aspect of Zozo's whole college career. Likewise, she was quite unaware that the slow detour around the campus was not entirely for the purpose of showing her the sights. Another youth on a motorcycle, leaving the sadly separating group of the defeated—who carefully maintained the pose of indifference—was dashing to the Pi House at full speed.

"Glad rags!" he shouted as he clattered into the hallway. "On their way. His mother's with him!"

Then there was scurrying to and fro. The stage must be reset for the feminine eye. Boys who had been intended to "protrubérate around," as the old ducky had it, with the block S on their sweated chests, hastened to assume the lofty collar. Others rushed to their rooms to modify the pictorial decorations. The seniors, who occupied the best room, performed miracles of rehabilitation and transformation for Minnie's occupancy. That was the drawback to the best room: it had to be given up when stern necessity commanded the entertainment of the feminine. It was known as the Hen Roost. The motorcycle was dispatched for flowers.

So accurate had these evolutions become by training and practice that when, ten minutes later, the red car drew up at the curb, the Pi House was a delightful picture of the College Man at Home. Some sat in chairs on the veranda, their feet on the

rail. Others perched on the rail itself. From the opened windows of the living room came the tinkle of a mandolin. Students sauntered from the doorway and down the walk, books under their arm. One youth in shirt sleeves, his hair touseled, a green shade over his eyes, could be discerned through an upper window deep in his studies.

Strangely enough the Pi House alone of the six along Fraternity Row seemed to present this gay and careless animation. All the others appeared to be utterly deserted. But from behind shutters and curtains furious eyes were gazing upon the innocent tableau across the way, muttered curses stirred the draperies.

II

Minnie and Zozo were escorted to the veranda and met the carefully picked youths who had been seated there. It was a great surprise and pleasure to them. They were always glad to welcome to the Pi House any friends of Ronald's: Ronald never failed to have nice friends. She was not disturbing them at all: on the contrary, it was delightful of her to consent to come see them. Minnie found herself almost flirting with the two fascinating young men who had seated themselves on either side of her. They were remarkably keen and clever, and sparkingly deferential. All the others had disappeared, Zozo with them. Finally Minnie glanced at her watch.

"But I must not keep you," she said, making as though to rise. "You must have many things to do, just at the beginning of the term. And we must get about our affairs."

This did not meet with approval. Hotel? It was atrocious! impossible! She must not think of going there. And there was no need for it. All the men were not yet back, and the House had several vacant rooms. It would be a pleasure—an honour—if she would occupy one of them. And, they pointed out, it was going to be a tremendous fag to look for quarters for Zozo, and see to the red-tape of his registration, and all the rest of it without expert advice. They dealt in expert advice, and it was all at her service.

"But it's an imposition!" cried Minnie. "Why, we are quite strangers to you."

"The only way to get over that, Mrs. Kirby," laughed the dark one, "is to stay and get to know us better. But really," he continued more seriously, "you will be doing us a great favour. It

isn't often we get a chance to see a woman at our table. It's a treat. And you surely want to meet some more of your son's rough, rude college mates. Please!"

Minnie was over-persuaded. She was escorted to the Hen Roost, which she found charming. The flowers had arrived five minutes before, but they were not brought in until five minutes later.

III

Nothing could have been more delightful than the evening that followed. After dinner in the basement dining room, they all repaired to the living room. This was a round room with a wide divan running all about it, a fireplace, a piano, a centre table, and three or four chairs. The walls were adorned with photographs of nationally prominent Pi's and with group pictures of the classes arranged in chronological order. Minnie was made comfortable with cushions. A young man sat on either side of her—different young men; relayed, had she known it. Zozo was being attended to at the other side of the room. A group played cards at the table. Others lounged and chatted. It was all delightfully informal and easy and natural—and prearranged. After a time somebody spoke up lazily with a happy inspiration.

"Come on, hit the box, Pete," he called across the eddying smoke. "Give us the Irish Terriers."

Pete obligingly uncoiled his length, grinned, and approached the piano. The Irish Terriers reminded someone of another song. Then Pete announced that he wanted to be amused himself, suppose "Swede" Bartlett get busy. "Swede" Bartlett told three stories in three different dialects. It became a vaudeville performance, all informal, and very amusing. Certainly never were there so many talented young men gathered together in one room. And then Pete went back to the piano and struck a few chords and they all sang in chorus. The songs were all of good old Pi, and the parts were well taken.

About half-past eight, however, one and another of the gathering gracefully excused themselves to Mrs. Kirby on the ground that studies claimed their attention. They were desolated to leave, but of course she would understand—the Pi reputation for scholarship was high and its sons ever loyal——

She not only excused them but secretly commended their conscientiousness. Had she known college status more intimately she

might have remarked that the youths who thus withdrew were invariably upper classmen. She would have been puzzled, however, had she caught certain malevolent glances thrown after them by the sophomores. The latter appeared to be without the lofty scholastic ambitions of the classes before them. They continued to lead a merry carefree college life in the smoking room.

Minnie had not enjoyed herself so much for a long time. It did her good to be with unthinking youth again. And it was all so spontaneous, and the boys were so without jealousy in their urging into the limelight of one another's bashful talents. However, at ten o'clock she thought she'd better retire; and that as Zozo would have a hard day to-morrow, perhaps he'd better retire, too. She was accompanied solicitously upstairs.

Once her door had closed the escort shot downstairs again with long and noiseless leaps. They joined their little playmates, already waiting for them by the front door, and the group with infinite precaution sneaked along the front walk and down the street. At last they were freed to join the seniors and juniors in their researches.

IV

No member of any other fraternity got a chance to speak to either Zozo or Minnie alone. The Kirbys were of sufficient importance to warrant a lot of trouble. A bodyguard of two was in constant attendance, on one excuse or another. Zozo was steered by experts through the mysteries of registration: his few "electives" were picked for him with care. Three solicitous youths even draped themselves about on the car that took Minnie apartment-hunting; though they certainly displayed no expert knowledge, and indeed rather wet-blanketed the desirability of what was inspected. They urged Minnie not to commit herself.

On the evening of the second day, in the midst of the fun, Zozo was begged quietly by an impressive sophomore to step into the hall a moment. He did so, only to be told that somebody wished to see him in the parlour. In that little-used back apartment sat "Swede" Bartlett and Martin Ferris, two of the august seniors. They were at this moment very august indeed, not only in manner but in clothing, both of which seemed to have been assumed as for a very especial occasion. At Zozo's entrance, accompanied by the sophomore, they arose together. The sophomore took his place by the entrance like a sentinel.

Zozo was confused. He heard the Swede addressing him as Mr. Kirby in measured tones, but his mental state was such that he did not fully appreciate at its æsthetic worth the beautiful vehicle of the Swede's thought. He did gather the thought itself, however; and when the universe hushed for his momentous reply he stammered out:

"Why, fellows, there is nothing I'd like better, of course, but——"

That was as far as he got. He was unable, fortunately, to finish by saying that he thought he'd better consult his mother: enough of the mother-stuff was to his debit already. However, he was not in danger. No experienced man would have permitted any extension of that *but*. He found himself being shaken cordially by the hand. By some sleight of hand which he did not follow a Pi pledge button had leaped into the buttonhole of his coat lapel. Next he was in the doorway of the smoking room with twoscore eyes upon him. "Swede" Bartlett and Ferris stood at his either elbow.

"Brothers," said the Swede impressively, "a new-pledged brother to dear old Pi!"

v

There ensued a delightful heart-warming confusion. Everybody leapt at him to shake his hand and congratulate him. Everybody's face was in a broad happy grin.

"Now you'll forgive us for not finding you a decent apartment," laughed one of Minnie's escorts to her. "We suspected something like this. Now he will live in the House."

Pete struck chords on the piano. A hush instantly fell. Someone unobtrusively opened a window, possibly for air, possibly for a wider acoustical distribution. For the song that rolled out through that window and dashed high and arrogant against the sullen cliffs of Fraternity Row was that pæan of triumphant victory: *We pull for dear old Pi!* The baffled warriors in the opposing camps, with muttered curse, laid aside swords that strategy had forced to rust in idleness. They needed not to await Zozo's next day appearance with the pledge button to know that he was lost to them for ever.

CHAPTER LVIII

IN THEIR own minds Minnie and Fred looked upon the period of Zozo's college course as years of waiting. Each in his own fashion they had plumbed this new life that had been thrust upon them, and had—each in his own fashion—found it intrinsically unsatisfactory. The natural reaction was to transfer the centre of interest from the immediate present to the future, from their own egocentricity to the person of one in whom the future dwelt. Zozo's maturity would supply the reason for existence. His coming definitely into life as a full-grown being could not fail to give it a meaning it now lacked. He had been brought up to it, brought up for it. When Zozo had finished college, and was ready for active life, Fred could see possibilities of interesting expansions. The two of them together could undertake enterprises of power, of construction—whatever appealed to them as worth the doing. In the glow of this thought, in the studied preparation for that time to come, Fred discovered a new fascination in the dull pressing office work. He felt he was getting things in shape for Zozo. There came into the office—into life itself—a meaning that had not existed before. It should always have been there, of course; but somehow it had required the actual symbol of his son's absence at college to make him realize that the thing was in a definite and immediate future.

Minnie experienced much the same renaissance, though of course in a different direction. Her interest was even more imminent. Zozo would be coming back for holidays, grown up, a college man. She must place him before her social world. He must have house parties, entertainments. He must bring home some of his chums. She must cultivate the youngest set a little, find out who and what they were. The palace, which had rather fallen into dull indifference, resumed its former importance. The second generation of the dynasty was imminent. All the values which had dimmed when considered merely in relation to herself took on a new effulgence when projected thus into a continuing future. Life itself became once more vitally significant.

To-day was overcast and spoiled ; but Zozo's adolescence suddenly offered a to-morrow. He was the centre of life, the reason for hopeful being, the symbol of that desire for continuing progress without which—in one form or another—the human soul could not go on. Oh, Zozo was very important!

CHAPTER LIX

I

IT TOOK Zozo himself a little time to find out just how important he was, but he got there finally.

He was, of course, well known because of his family's circumstances before he arrived. He possessed, as we have seen, proud raiment, a heavily powered motor car craftily designed for the discomfort of those within it and those without it, and a most liberal allowance secretly augmented by his mother. All these things made for his prominence, even as a freshman, and without consideration of personal idiosyncrasy. But his personality and training must inevitably have set him apart also. Anything your college boy considers "different" and that he cannot understand is either "jay" or a "wonder." Zozo was a wonder.

It must be remembered that he was now on his own for the first time in all his young life. He who had been closely restrained now felt no restraint at all. Nobody who has not experienced the iron supervision of anxious authority over all his waking moments through all of what should have been his experimental years could possibly understand Zozo. All sorts of repressed hungers crowded forward in him, keen for the trough. They—and he—had been starved. Now they—and he—clamoured for something vital.

How should he know what was vital? He had grown without resistances, without struggle of any kind; a forced thing, without fibre. All he possessed was a curiosity and a blind instinct. The only way he knew of satisfying the blind instinct was through his physical sensations. Zozo promptly "ran an exciting muck" among them all—music, speeding, drinking, gambling—everything but girls. He hadn't quite the confidence yet for girls. But the rest was a groping for the superlative that life must hold; something to fill the floating emptiness; anything that *felt*—even a pain—any actual sensation.

There was no desire in Zozo for display. That was a by-

product. He was immediately prominent because he could not help but be. It would have grieved him had he known that he exasperated upper classmen to tears as the freshest freshman that the college had ever known. It would have filled his sky with a foreboding terror could he have sat in with the distraught faculty on his own case. Of course, a college is a democratic institution; wealth or poverty makes no difference; even-handed justice for all. Still, it is a notorious fact that one can scarcely expect more endowments from a man whose son has been fired. He would have been equally—though differently—moved had he known that by another element he was looked up to with awe and a guilty adoration.

Externally Zozo's promptly acquired reputation was fully justified. Internally his wildness was only lack of control and a blind search.

As was natural he gravitated toward what was known as the "swift bunch." In the eyes of the college at large he was the bright-shining lurid meteoric head of that bunch. To the bunch itself it was different. Though easily the most spectacular, he was by no means the trusted leader.

To them he was a queer one, never to be depended on. He was erratic. Nobody quite understood why he did things, or what he was going to do next. That in itself gave him a certain prestige.

His excesses were simply crazy! He flung away wads of money in wild betting, when there wasn't a remote chance of winning anything; and then all at once in a sudden panicky reaction he'd close up like a clam at the wrong time. His outbreaks were bewilderingly aimless. He'd take part in the most damfool escapades in the most recklessly spectacular manner, and then he'd refuse to have anything to do with the holiest of cinches.

II

It was all very simple if any one had had the key. But nobody had it. He got a panic whenever he did anything. The worst of it was, these unbalanced and untimely spurts in all directions did not even possess the merit of satisfying him temporarily. On the contrary, they rather worried him. He was restlessly running about in all directions in a flurry of eagerness for life, but without a trace of any coördinated action. Like a cunningly devised automaton he went through the motions of a civilized human being, but within him was an untracked wilderness. In

spite of his apparent wild independence, he had almost the street waif's attitude toward policemen or authority of any kind. He could have been rounded up easily enough; but his external actions had them all bluffed. Nobody tried seriously, as yet, to round him up.

The extraordinarily superficial quality of his deeds was dimly sensed by the youthful instincts of his contemporaries. One set called him Old Nobodyhome. The nickname was not inapt. Much of the time his grasp of things was that of a sleep walker. This condition alternated with the sudden moments of wakefulness when he ran amuck in his astonishing way.

III

One constant interest he did possess. He was a "bug" on racing of any kind or description. Horse racing, of course; and all sorts of track racing, particularly the sprints; but especially any kind of motor racing. On events of that sort he would bet his socks, as the boys said. He tried desperately to be permitted to drive in some of the automobile races, either the long road races then in vogue, or the skiddy mile-track affairs occasionally pulled off as especial attractions at the county fairs. But the Kirby millions were in his way. No promoter dared permit it. They told Zozo to get his father's consent in writing; which of course finished it. But that did not prevent Zozo from being not only an enthusiastic spectator, but an inveterate hanger-on at the garages and racing pits where the cars were tended. He liked to put on overalls and work with the muckiest of them. His mind awakened to its full capacity then. Not only did he pick up innumerable hints of all sorts; but on one or two occasions he gained the respect of the master mechanic by suggestions of his own which were considered and finally adopted.

After each of these too-rare sessions his own monster was retired for a brief season while under his personal supervision new gadgets of one sort or another were installed at the local shop. Some of them worked satisfactorily; others proved disappointing and were removed after absorbingly interesting trial. There were schemes and devices to assist carburetion by breaking the spray in the manifold, by water infusion, by air valves, by thermostat heating; ideas as to proof against punctures; especial shock absorbers, electric manifold heaters, auxiliary valves, front wheel brakes—a whole array of them. Then, when they were all in

place, Zozo took the road, roaring out the highways like a fulfilment of Apocalypse prophecy, crouched behind his huge wheel, every fibre of his being alert and alive and working in exquisite coördination with his watchful coolly calculating brain. He was happy; though probably the same could not be said of those who happened to be occupying the same strip of earth.

He did not go in for athletics, but he was a strong supporter of the teams.

CHAPTER LX

ZOZO was not very strong with the girls. Indeed, he had nothing to do with them at any price until the first holidays at Christmas time. This was a most astonishing experience for Zozo. Suddenly he found himself of grown-up importance! He was being treated as a person and not as a child to be reprimanded at every step! His hours were not supervised!

Minnie gave a huge party in his honour, and after that there were many others. Zozo was out every night, to all hours. When Minnie's project was announced to him on his first evening home he was inclined to balk and be sullen about it. He had no use for girls, and he did not like to dance. But as the experience was not fatal, he got over it to a certain extent. There could be no manner of doubt that he was popular, in fact, the king pin of the alley. He was a "college man" and a Kirby. That was quite sufficient. He might have been humpbacked and crosseyed and got away with it, as far as Little Falls was concerned. As a matter of fact he was rather good-looking in a heavy-set, black-browed fashion.

Of course, he found no continuance of such adulation when he returned after the holidays to college. That was not to be expected. Making all due allowances, your college youth of either sex is a pretty independent creature, and even the smallest college is a bigger world than even the largest small town. But at least he had discovered that girls were not instantly fatal. He no longer took his former exquisite pains to avoid them.

Still, he was no ladies' man. As a "fusser" he was shy and uncertain when it came to girls of his own class in life. The confounded things seemed to find him amusing in a way he did not like. They treated him well enough—trust the dear creatures for that!—but he was sufficiently shrewd to appreciate that in their eyes he occupied a different status from Sammy Hillyer, for example. The freemasonry argot of the "inside" was unknown to him. Things changed when he and his prospective millions hove in sight.

He discovered, however, that the girls outside his own class were a different proposition. Zozo was unconscious snob enough to feel a little superior, and that superiority gave him just the confidence needed. With such he was quite expansive and self-possessed. They seemed flatteringly conscious of his brilliant attainments and glowing sense of mastership. But in spite of that he never really got much of anywhere.

On the mere sex side also his diffidence stood in his way. Sex in him was timidly violent, like all the rest of him. He was unconvinced that he could speak that argot successfully either; and he could not bear the thought of appearing unsophisticated at his age. Some of the damsels with whom he consorted were, alas, what the age called frail, and had he been any one but himself he might have discovered that fact. But the Kirby millions intervened. King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid meant nothing in literature to these sprightly young persons, but the principle in real life was not unknown to them. Primrose dalliance was all very well; but primrose dalliance never led to matrimony. Zozo was surrounded by virtue, calculated and otherwise.

Some of these gay and dashing ladies played their cards very well. Once or twice he reached the point of wondering whether he might not be in love, but so many inhibitions balked and tormented him that he didn't get very far. He played cat and mouse exasperatingly. The feather-brained fair ones knew nothing of inhibitions, and could stand only about so much play-acting for a purpose. One by one they gave him up as a prospect. He got the reputation of being absolutely hard-boiled as far as falling for girls was concerned. As a matter of fact, he was dead ripe for the sort who would know how to go about him.

Minnie, of course, thought him all sweet innocence.

CHAPTER LXI

I

MOST well-defined needs in this world seem to attract the complements they require. The complement in this case must be an unusual combination. She must have the insight to read Zozo's case; she must be coldly unscrupulous and calculating; and she must be adaptable enough to be willing to leave the reward to circumstances. Such a person, of the appropriate sex, is rare; especially among the fluffy-fluffs with whom Zozo would feel at ease. However, in due time, she appeared.

She visited Maisie Knopf, who was one of the most cynical and disillusioned of the College Widows, an unscrupulous creature of great experience, considerable pulchritude, and a single-minded intention to get all the fun out of life she could. Fun, in her definition, consisted of a swarm of admirers, a succession of joy-rides and road-house parties, and public popularity above the public popularity of all her sisters. To attain these ends she was calculatingly willing to use the necessary means. Maisie had few inhibitions. She was expert at all the tricks of amorous trifling. Maisie's waist and Maisie's lips had carried her on the crest of her own particular wave. In the college slang of the day, she was a "necker." As a wise College Widow she knew when to "draw the line," as she expressed it; but drawing the line was the result rather of calculation than shining virtue. She lived in a small house with futile parents. Of course, she had had a shot at Zozo, but had early drawn off. Her narrow but complete wisdom had shown her nothing substantial was to be expected there; and Zozo's society could add nothing to her prestige in popularity.

But her visitor, Floribelle Mumford, was in different case. Floribelle was a manicurist in one of the big city hotels. She was entirely on her own. She was a bold buccaneer, sailing under neutral colours until a galleon worthy of her prowess might

heave in sight. She too drew the line—as far as known—but she carried an eraser. Without kith or kin, and with a keen estimating brain, she sailed alone.

The two girls had struck up a friendship during one of Maisie's rare visits to the city. Maisie had been fascinated by the direct open cynicism of the manicurist, a cynicism that scorned the wrappings of a shabby convention. The end was an invitation to Floribelle to spend her vacation in the college town to "look 'em over."

Floribelle was mildly interested. Men merely as men were plentiful enough in her own hunting ground.

"Got any gold fish down there?" she enquired.

"Gold fish?" repeated Maisie, puzzled.

"Yes, gold fish. Kids with the rocks."

"The boys are pretty good spenders; they give you a good time."

"No one likes a good time better than I do, dearie. But right here in the city is where they first tried to see if bright lights would burn. What I want is a good spender, of course; but not one that's blowing in his last red. There must be plenty more where that came from. Y'see I might want to do a little spending myself later."

Maisie laughed a trifle bitterly.

"These boys aren't so easy to marry as you might think," she observed.

"Maybe so; maybe not. I ain't so particular about the wedding bells provided I get the spending."

"Oh!" cried Maisie, "you don't mean you'd——"

Floribelle laughed.

"Lord, but you're an innocent young thing!" she jeered. "No, I don't mean I'd——" she mimicked Maisie's half-shocked, half-fascinated tone, "unless it happened to amuse me, or something went wrong. It isn't necessary, dearie, if you can catch them young enough and know your way about. There's more than one way to skin a cat. It isn't a question of *how*, it's a question of *if*. You haven't answered my question."

"There's only one real gold fish," then replied Maisie, adopting the slang, "but he's hopeless."

"Hopeless? How do you mean? And what exactly *are* his prospects in life?"

They went into executive session on Zozo.

II

The upshot was that Floribelle packed her little trunk and spent her little vacation in the little house wherein were already crowded Maisie and her two futile parents. Floribelle, in secret, turned up her pretty nose at the whole show. She found it all cheap and tawdry. The college boys were too callow for words after the immense sophistications and worldly assurances of her daily drummers and buyers. Not for one holy minute would she have lingered around such a sickening dump if she had not had very definite ends in view.

First of all, she imperiously demanded Zozo. It was not difficult to lure Zozo to a gang party; though he was a very shy bird to decoy in single flight. Then, having been presented to Zozo, she did nothing about it for two days—except study him. At the end of that time she announced to Maisie, with an apparently impulsive kiss, that she was ready to begin. They were dressing in Maisie's tiny little room in preparation for an excursion that evening with the gang.

"I've got your boob signed up, dearie," said she, "and now I'm going to separate the dear thing from some of his bright nice new dollars. Little Floribelle needs them in her business."

Maisie was thrilled. Shopworn little College Widow that she was, her divagations had been after all an aimless mistaken search for pleasure and the gratification of vanity. She would quite unscrupulously have "caught" herself a desirable husband; but this cold-blooded financial undertaking was beyond her.

"Do you think you can?" she asked.

"I know I can," stated Floribelle with conviction. "Look here, dearie," she enquired sharply, "you certain I'm not walking on your toes? You don't want him yourself?" Floribelle, it seems, had a code of her own.

"No, no," hastened Maisie, who had given Zozo up as a bad job long ago.

"Well, that's all right, then. But I don't see why. He's easy picking; and he's got lots of feathers."

Maisie sunk her pride in her desire for instruction.

"I made a stab for him," she confessed.

Floribelle looked at her shrewdly. That capable damsel read Maisie's unexpressed desire. She was not averse to gratify it, and at the same time show off a little. Her two days' inspection

of Zozo had taught her more of the inside workings of that young man than any Kirby had ever known.

"Listen here, dearie," she said. "You've had that bird all wrong from the start. Because he's got a lot of money and a swell bunch of clothes and a Lord Clarence manner, and keeps his mouth shut, you've been scared of him a little. Haughty aristocracy, and all that stuff. Rot! He's just bashful, and scared of himself, and scared of being laughed at. He's just a mamma's boy that's been raised a pet and has never been off the chain. He's so scared of doing it wrong, that he won't never start. You've got to do it all yourself."

"That's been tried," said Maisie.

"Yes, but you've got to make it look like an accident all the while—oh, shucks! I can't tell you, but you watch my smoke."

III

If any one has visualized Floribelle as a hard little piece, he has been woefully mistaken. She was the small, appealing, wide-eyed, pink-cheeked, long-lashed, soft, and rounded model. Anybody would want to take care of Floribelle; and nobody would ever have suspected that calculation could have had anything to do with the numberless small revelations of personal charms, the unconscious semi-cuddlings, or other fortuitous circumstances by which her soft femininity was made evident to an always embarrassed Zozo. Zozo looked away, but not before he had seen. A rounded knee had some strategic value then, before woman in the sublime confidence of her charm had thrown away most of her weapons. What price a rounded knee these days? Modern woman has left nothing to draw on. Any small accidents nowadays would call for the police.

Floribelle played these things skilfully. A remote suspicion of purpose in them would have sent Zozo scuttling up his tree and into his hole. And with equal skill she lured him out toward the swift running waters. It must seem that they were simply drifting, idly, without purpose. When the current caught them, they must both have been unaware. Circumstances, fate, had swept them away!

It was an easy game, as Floribelle had said. Maisie followed it with awestricken admiration. In four days Zozo was not only ensnared, but he was imbued with the idea that he was the devil

of a fellow. He blossomed out. His repressed self-confidence became blatant.

IV

All went merrily, and Floribelle had almost permitted herself to envisage a matrimonial possibility to all this, when Minnie happened to make one of her periodical incursions.

She did this sort of thing about every three or four months, to Zozo's vast embarrassment and concealed resentment, and to the huge delight of the undergraduate. She never did much. A gracious visit to the Pi House for a meal; a little tea party in Zozo's rooms; a gracious and playful visit, with a hang-dog Zozo in tow, to the harassed president of the institution; that was about the usual routine. She had the air of wanting to know all his little playmates. And somehow that very graciousness at once and paradoxically reduced Zozo to the status of a small boy in Fauntleroy clothes, and at the same time set him apart as a remarkable being whose superiorities should be considered self-evident. He was miserably conscious of the ribald spectators who would take it out on him later.

Minnie did not see—or hear of—Floribelle; but Floribelle saw and very carefully appraised Minnie. The idea of matrimony she thereupon definitely abandoned. Her shrewd brain perceived that no headway could be made here. At the first hint of such complication, the heart-broken lovers would be very decisively swept apart. And Zozo would go. He had evidently jumped through too many hoops in his time to refuse this one when offered by this very decisive woman. Indeed Floribelle sensed instantly the effect even of this visit. Zozo had become unconsciously, almost imperceptibly clandestine!

But Floribelle was an expert gold digger. There were, as she had said, many ways to skin a cat.

V

Floribelle's vacation was nearly over. She must return to the city. The city was two hours away. It was necessary to step forward.

So obvious a contact as Zozo's passion for his motor car could not have escaped her attention. But curiously enough she had never yet been honoured by a ride in the monster. In this she was not unique: neither had any other girl, she discovered, nor

mighty few men. A strange kink in Zozo's brain caused him to look on his car as a sort of sacred institution. It was his only instrument of release from his vacillating, formless, tormenting life. Behind its wheel, in control of its mighty powers, he was freed. Almost mystically, certainly pathetically, he had withheld it apart from all the concerns and problems of his daily life, sacred to the only higher mood he knew.

Floribelle had hinted often enough, had even suggested; but with an uncharacteristic ingenuity and resourcefulness Zozo had managed with fair plausibility to put her off.

Maisie laughed.

"He's a nut on that," she grinned at her friend's discomfiture. "If you make that grade, Floss, you're on the job, I'll say. You can announce the engagement then."

Floribelle gritted her little teeth.

Two days later she was to return to her job in the city. She and Zozo had eluded the gang and were wandering late at night under the campus trees. Everything was remarkably propitious. There was a moon, with dark shadows; and crickets and tree frogs; and the scent of sweet things on the tepid air. They had wandered for some time in silence. Zozo, astonishingly, found that he had her in his arms, and was kissing her distractedly and somewhat unskilfully, and that she was crying softly for no reason at all.

"There, there, darling," he was murmuring foolishly. "Don't cry. Please don't. What is it?" And he kissed her again.

"I so *hate* to go away!" she cried. "Oh, I do hate it! Why have you done this to me? The past two weeks have gone so fast, and I've felt like a fly in a spider's web. Always people, people, people, everywhere; and all I've wanted was to be alone somewhere with you."

Pretty crude work with any one else; but she knew her Zozo. He was feeling about forty-two inches around the chest and excessively protective and masterful. Suddenly he, too, realized the ubiquitousness of that confounded gang. Why did they always insist on going around in a bunch? (Floribelle had skilfully seen to it that they did.) Dog-gone it; they'd wasted all the time he might have had with her——

"Look here," he said, gruffly and abruptly because his heart was palpitating with his boldness in suggesting the idea, "I know a place, about twenty miles down the road toward the city, where

they give you a perfectly dandy dinner. Let's shake the gang and go down there to-morrow night, just us two, in The Car. I know," he hastened to add, quite unnecessarily, "that it's sort of —well, unconventional; but come on, just this once. Nobody'll know about it except Maisie, and we can fix it with her. Oh, come on!"

He stopped, appalled at his own temerity. She snuggled closer into the hollow of his arm.

"Oh, I think that will be heavenly!" she murmured.

"Let's go early," he urged. "Let's go about four. We'll get a good drive."

"All right," she agreed.

CHAPTER LXII

MINNIE and Fred were talking in the terrace overlooking the Lake. The immediate occasion was one of Zozo's brief, infrequent, and chaotic letters, over which they were laughing together with a fond and indulgent amusement. Of late the couple had been approaching again an old intimacy from which they had imperceptibly drifted until a wide gap had intervened. It was the influence of Zozo that had turned the tide. Or rather it was the immediate new aspect of Zozo as the immediate fulfilment. The future seemed to have moved up suddenly. It had been remote, almost visionary; now it was real, about to happen. It became connected with the ordinary doings of to-day's life and immensely quickened them.

"There's one thing we can set our minds at rest on," Minnie laughed. "Zozo will never be a literary man. Expressing himself in English is not precisely his forte."

"I don't know as I'd want him to be a literary man," said Fred stoutly. "I notice he gets his ideas over all right. I gather without the slightest trouble that he'd like a little increase in his allowance."

"But his spelling!" cried Minnie.

"Clear case of inheritance," said Fred. "I never could spell myself. It's a fifth wheel. Some people have it; others haven't. What I'm interested in is the rest of his head."

"Zozo has stability," said Minnie. "He's the sort that develops slowly but surely. He is solid. But he's beginning to expand. I noticed such a difference in him over two years ago. And he's clean and dependable, not a bit like that Thomas boy."

"He'd better not be like that Thomas boy—the cub! I never could abide a chippy-chaser."

"Don't be vulgar—but he *is* a nice boy. And it's only two years now. We'll have lots of young people here to visit—fill the place up. It'll make us young again, Fred."

"Who says you're getting old? Show him to me! But it *will* be fun. And I'll be glad to have him with me. The kid's got a good head on him, even if he don't say much. When I get him worked in a little, we'll swing into double harness. I've got things in pretty good shape for him to take hold. I think I'll start him in first in one or the other of the factories—give him an idea of industrial methods. That would be just for a little while. Then I'll take him right with me in the office——"

"I'm not going to let you work him too hard!" interposed Minnie warningly.

"Don't worry. There's nothing in this working too hard. I've found that out. But he'll take hold. There's an awful lot of interest in it." Fred stopped short, amazed at this statement he had himself made. "At least, there is when you have somebody to work with."

"I know," Minnie nodded, "I know just what you mean. This place here"—she looked about her as if seeing it for the first time—"it is pretty big, takes a good deal of management. It costs a good deal——"

"Correct!" cried Fred, fervently.

"There have been times when I wondered why I should bother, why I should wear myself down keeping it running smoothly just for a lot of people who accept it all and go away and don't really care a snap of their fingers about us."

"Oh, I don't quite think——"

"I mean they'd have been just as glad to come and had just as good a time if anybody else owned the place. But now I can see it's going to be fun. Fred," she said, "you know we've been awfully blind. Here we've put a lot of time and thought into training and educating Zozo to take his proper place in the world, and yet we have never really visualized it as happening. Now that it's actually on us, we're surprised."

"By Jove!" cried Fred.

"What is it?"

"Why, that's it, isn't it? It's the *meaning* of it all! I've been wondering and wondering what was the use, and getting more and more tired and sick of it. So have you!" he interpolated with a sudden flash of illumination. "By Jove, here's the reason!"

Minnie stared, not so much in incomprehension as in surprise over an unexpected Fred.

"It's our reason for doing things," he explained, thinking she

did not understand. "It is what gives life its *meaning*. I must tell Cousin Jim."

"It's a pretty good reason," said Minnie, softly, "—bless his heart!"

But she did not mean Cousin Jim.

CHAPTER LXIII

AT PRECISELY four o'clock the monster glided silently to the curb and Floribelle took her seat on the semi-prone contraption supposed to give her comfort.

"Isn't this a perfectly dear car!" she murmured as she arranged her skirts.

Zozo did not reply, but he raised the muffler cut out and stepped on her. The monster leaped away, shooting like a machine gun, leaving on the peaceful evening air its usual aftermath of shattering echoes, oil smoke, dust, burned gasoline, and profanity. For a few minutes Floribelle was too impressed and scared to speak. She had never ridden in any vehicle that was quite so noisy, quite so disconcertingly swift. Zozo, too, kept silent. He guided the apparatus coolly on the last-moment hañ's-breadth principle. After a short interval, however, they emerged into the open country. Zozo kicked a spring with his foot. At once the monster ceased its wild ululations and fell into a comfortable fireside purr.

"My goodness!" said Floribelle, "why didn't you do that before?"

"I sort of like to hear her," replied Zozo, "but isn't she a sweet-running motor? You can't even hear a valve click."

"It's a beauty," agreed Floribelle, vaguely.

"She fools you," continued Zozo, "she runs so smooth. Now you'd swear we weren't going over twenty-five, wouldn't you? Feels like that would in any other car. Well"—he glanced at the speedometer—"it's thirty-eight."

"Isn't that pretty fast?" asked Floribelle, with slight uneasiness.

"That's nothing, nothing at all. You can see she's built low and she holds the road. And she's got enough power so the gear ratio can be kept up. You don't have to turn up a lot of revolutions to get your speed. But," he interpolated hastily, "that doesn't mean she won't throttle down. That's where her balance comes in."

He throttled her down by way of demonstration, little by little, until she was crawling along at about four miles an hour.

"See that!" he cried triumphantly, "and hitting as regular and smooth! not a skip or a cough or a jerk!"

This was all very well, but Floribelle felt that some of this enthusiasm might be better directed. The present rate of speed seemed propitious. She allowed a little jounce in the road to throw her against him. His arm went around her waist. The monster glided slowly to the side of the road——

"Hi, there, break away!" yelled a raucous voice some moments later.

They looked up startled to see a grinning face jeering at them from a slowly passing delivery wagon. "Cherries are ripe," added the face cryptically.

Zozo turned red. Though flustered he retaliated. A kick at the spring and the monster again leapt forward full voiced while the astonished delivery horse performed acrobatics. Zozo for a time drove like mad. He was most upset and embarrassed. Floribelle remained calm. She had noted the name on the delivery wagon. Such things might come handy—or they might not; you never could tell.

It was now falling dusk and Zozo switched on his lights. His perturbation over being surprised was passing, as was indicated by the fact that the monster was again purring.

"We're 'most there," he muttered after a while.

"It's a heavenly ride," she said. "I never saw such a wonderful car. I never went so fast in my life before: I didn't know a car could go so fast."

"Lord!" cried Zozo out of his pride, "you don't call that fast! Why, that's nothing. There's a fine straight stretch of road for four miles just after we pass that clump of trees ahead. I'll show you what she can do."

"I don't believe I'll like it," protested she.

"Don't worry," Zozo assured her, "I've driven this old boat for three years."

They rounded the clump of trees. In the gathering dusk straight as a string the road ran ahead of them glimmering. Zozo stepped on the throttle.

CHAPTER LXIV

I

DAYS on days; days on days. The repeated acts of our days on days make of us certain shaped things; slowly, imperceptibly, and we move thus in what seems to us our appointed place, related to other things like ourselves and to what we call our environment. Then in the rhythm of life a sharp blow is struck; and this blow sets the particles dancing. Suddenly we find that the thing we have shaped in our days on days pops with mathematical nicety into the place that will fit it. It is as though a lot of scattered things were dancing about, and, *clap!* they are all in a pattern. We call it fate or luck or destiny. But it is only the preparation of our days on days, our own deliberate handiwork. Or, to change the figure, it is as though the shock or blow had shaken us through graded sieves that suddenly revealed magnitudes where before all was too mixed to be measured.

Another glimpse:

The sieve is shaken, and now at last we see what we have acquired. With that we must make something for the future. It cannot go back on the dump heap. That is what we have made from our days on days.

To-day is our only point of contact. To-day we can begin reshaping ourselves, so that when again there comes a shock of life's rhythm, we will fall into a different place. It is, after all, in our hands. Only when we are too lazy, or too ignorant, or too perverse to shape ourselves are we at the mercy of the Pattern Maker. No amount of shaking will fit us into a place for which we are not shaped.

Here are two great forces working reciprocally: our own individual power constantly reshaping us by the simple acts of our days on days; and this rhythmic force that jiggles our lives into their patterns. The first is stronger than the second. We can get from one pattern into another. Yet we prate of blind destiny.

II

Fred had for once arrived home early from the office. Cousin Jim had gone spring-fishing, so the usual before-dinner foregathering was in abeyance for the moment. He dropped into a chair in the library, and prepared to glance over the market reports in the evening paper. But he postponed getting at it. He was tired.

A drink on the tabouret at his elbow, he rested his chin in his hand and stared unseeing through the long window into the garden beyond. How long he sat there, he did not know, for his mind was a blank. Then at last he became aware of the fact that a low and courteous but persistent buzzing was beseeching his attention. He arose heavily and walked over to the big desk where he unhooked the house telephone. His secretary's voice came to him.

"It's long distance, Mr. Kirby," the man apologized, "and they insist it's very important."

"Who is it?" asked Fred.

The secretary named the college town.

"Plug them in," commanded his employer.

For some time he listened carefully, his face without expression, questioning occasionally. Then he delivered a few instructions and returned the receiver to its hook. Afterward he sat motionless, staring at it.

He was aroused at last by Minnie's entrance. She was in street clothes, very simple, very smart. In her hands she carried a card case and a small bag which she threw aside on a divan. Evidently she was disturbed at something, and welcomed Fred's presence as an opportunity to talk about it. It was her habit. He was accustomed to the minute and infinite details of these petty annoyances which loomed large in Minnie's life, which enlisted the full energy of her combative spirit for simple lack of important resistances. She embarked on the full tide of it. Confusedly Fred registered fragments—something about the chauffeur who had been instructed to call for her at four-thirty sharp and had been ten minutes late because he had taken it upon himself to go by the shop for something he said he required.

"I told him he shouldn't think," she was saying. "It's coming to a pretty pass if——"

Fred suddenly raised his hand. A wave of immense triviality

seemed to have swept over him. An unreasoning deadly anger took possession of him that at such a time Minnie should be so vehemently pursuing her petty grievances.

"Oh, hush, Minnie!" he cried harshly.

She stared at him incredulously, about to transfer her irritation to him.

"I've had a message about Zozo. He's had an accident," went on Fred in dull monotone.

She stopped short in mid-career, her eyes widening.

"An accident?" she repeated in a little voice. She was searching his inscrutable face, her hand on her heart.

"A bad one, I'm afraid," said Fred, stirring. "You must gather yourself."

She stared at him a second longer, then her face began to work.

"Oh!" she cried, dropping her hand. "Oh! he's dead! Oh! Oh! Oh!"

Days on days; days on days.

The Pattern Maker had shaken the sieve.

CHAPTER LXV

I

ALL was done and finished off that could be done and finished off. Fred, grave and stern and withdrawn, attended to it, making one journey to the college town for the body, and another, later, to interview Floribelle where she lay in the hospital. Floribelle, at first weakly defiant and with some ulterior idea of damage suits, ended by becoming frightened at Fred's steady, hard, not unsympathetic aloofness. She talked freely and accepted what he offered her—which was generous enough—and signed the paper he laid before her, and so passed out of the episode decently and in order. One by one Fred took up the other details, big and little, and attended to them methodically and tied them neatly and laid them aside. At length they were all finished, even to the packing and shipping of the last of Zozo's effects. Fred returned to Little Falls.

He reported almost brusquely to Minnie in the darkened room where for the moment she chose to live. It seemed that he spoke from an immense distance within himself, and with an effort. It was the withdrawal of an animal in pain, nursing its hurt solitary in the depths of its cave, proving an imperative necessity for immobility until the lesions should knit together. He would have liked to talk freely, perhaps; but he could not. Minnie found place in her storm and turmoil for a resentment at his lack of sympathy. His face had lost its round, easy good nature. It had become cast in grave, austere lines. His eye had an inner concentration, not as though on grief of the sort Minnie was experiencing, but as though he were contemplating steadily in inquiry something that he had set up before him.

II

The palace was closed to every visitor, and the servants answering the telephone gave an invariable reply: that Mrs. Kirby would speak to no one. Those who had considered themselves her confidantes, and those who held the proffering of consolation part of

their professional perquisites, were inclined to feel themselves affronted. The Reverend Andover in especial was completely unplussed.

But Minnie was not weeping in her chamber. Where another would have bowed, crushed under calamity, she fought like a caged beast. What had she done to be thus singled out for bereavement? Furious, resentful, she rebelled with all the force of her spirit. She stormed; she spent herself to a daily exhaustion in reviling ruthless fate. There was no justice in the blow that had been dealt her. Not only had she lost a beloved only son, but the whole structure of a lifetime's ambitions had been destroyed. Not only had a life dear to her been blotted out, but her own life's course had been turned back on itself as by a wall, and it had fallen into the turmoil of indirection. What good her efforts of the past twenty years? What good the existence she had built up so elaborately about herself? What good the planning and scheming, the labour, the triumph? What good? And what justice?

The household moved on tiptoe. The least stir, the slightest noise brought the lightnings down about the culprit's head. Minnie could not sleep, she could not sit still, she could not bear the sunlight, she could not stand the sound of voices. All the elaborate machinery of wealth and its autocratic authority were concentrated on this one point. Frightened servants, summoned by an angry bell, found her rigid and demanding, bolt upright in the middle of her room. Dry-eyed, trembling with suppressed fury, she wanted imperatively to know why that dog could not be kept quiet, or who was that whistling in the garden! They scurried away. She resumed her pacing to and fro, her beating against the fate that had overtaken her.

So useless! So ineffective! Such a force of rage, frenzy, almost madness! All the self-reliance and energy of a lifetime crashing on the rocks of an undiscovered, uncharted continent!

She wanted comfort, but it was not the comfort people knew how to give her. They would want to console. She could not have stood consolation. She felt she would scream blasphemy at that.

III

At last she sent for Cousin Jim. When he came, she met him in the corridor outside her room.

"I wanted to see you," she said immediately in her dry, strained voice, "but if you're going to try to offer me sympathy, you must go away, at once. I won't have it."

"I have no intention of offering you sympathy of the kind you mean," replied Cousin Jim.

They entered the room together, and Cousin Jim sat in an easy chair; and after a little he fumbled for his old pipe and lighted it. Minnie's first flash of thought unconnected with the storm in her own soul was a brief impulse of gratitude that he had not indulged in the triviality of asking her permission. Then the bitterness overwhelmed her again. She talked.

For an hour she poured herself out while Cousin Jim smoked. He was very grave, but he said no word of dissent or disapproval or disagreement. Injustice, rebellion, beating the bars, blaspheming the thing that had dared use her thus, refusal to submit, helplessness not to submit, rage thwarted but refusing to accept! Back and forth she beat in her little cage; and to each of her despairing demands thrown in the fact of an inscrutable universe Cousin Jim offered only silent understanding. When at last she dropped into a chair and began to sob, he arose.

"It's hard; it's very hard," was all he said, patting her shoulder; and went away.

IV

The havoc and hysteria of thwarted brain force had numbed and spent her at last. It left a growing disease of shattered self-reliance. She moved in the narrow circle of her daily life unheeding the things about her. The complicated affairs of the great house went forward smoothly and automatically without her knowledge. She dwelt in them but untouched by them. For the time being she inhabited a mechanical half-dazed world, semi-paralyzed in all her perceptions. Occupations she had none whatever. Fred was withdrawn from her in remote recesses of his own. The only mark in the daylight hours was the daily visit of Cousin Jim. They sat together mostly in silence; he smoking his pipe, she with her hands lying listlessly in her lap, her eyes staring straight in front of her. Sometimes they sat in the house, but mostly on the terrace, where the soft growing business of summer went on. He made no attempt to call to her attention even the smallest of the things about her that his kindly old eyes noted so understandingly, nor did he ever proffer a remark of his

own. When from the frozen depths of her consciousness a fragment of thought, a wisp of tender memory, a pang of grief, a surge of rebellion arose to her lips, his two or three words of response showed merely that he understood. Time up, he left her without conventional leave-taking.

She was trembling, spent, shattered in pride of intellect, numb of heart, dead of desire. Empty and dark were the days, like destroyed tissue of life. But in this unoccupied being great affairs were silently in preparation.

v

The first things that pierced the numbness and registered on her inner being just seeped in and seeped in without being either received or recorded. Timid and shy they stood about awaiting recognition. But that recognition delayed. Her consciousness had floated away on an uncharted sea, beyond its accustomed moorings; and her occasional little efforts to follow its drifting were always abandoned as requiring too much energy. There had been a great lowering of vitality. From an aggressive creature eagerly transfixing the scheme of life, Minnie was reduced to what seemed to her a vacuum of living. Only occasionally now came a stab of recollection, too painful to be more than momentarily sensed, before again a sweep of wreckage thrust her down.

This very defencelessness of non-acceptance and non-resistance made of her usually busy and directed mind a mere pool dimly shadowing reflections outside herself. They flitted across; some merely tormenting, some quietly healing and subtly comforting. Spiritual forces fought for possession of her drifting being.

The days went by muted and unnoticed. Cousin Jim came every afternoon, ostensibly for a cup of tea. Wisely he bided the time. It would be worse than useless to try to throw a lifeline until she had drifted within reach of it. The tides were strong with many currents. Anxiously he waited, helpless on shore.

It was a potent time. The influences were all there. But some of them must inevitably have had their origin in the past that Minnie had made for herself, and that had been made for her; and they dragged her toward the open sea.

Gradually the new direction defined itself. It became what is nowadays known as a complex. Everything even remotely connected with Minnie's former eager and burning ambitions became now too painful to be endured in the forefront of consciousness.

As each presented itself, it was with horror pushed below the level. That was a simple action of self-preservation.

VI

Here was the moment. That very self-preservation demanded, in fear and panic, something as a protective thought, some occupation of mind to crowd out unendurable memories. A dim, fluttering, unrecognized impulse asserted itself; a desire for the indestructible. In lack of a better term we call this the spiritual instinct.

VII

For weeks Minnie lived thus, almost entirely unaware of things outside herself. Somehow those things went on, and quite effectively. At any rate, the difference in no remotest sense equalled the tremendous effort she had formerly expended, and which now she had withdrawn. Life—even the wealthy life—functions quite well without any one of us. That is to some a humiliating thought; but through it we attain to an absolute necessity—the leisure of an unsmothered soul. Minnie had become buried pretty deep. Pity such drastic measures were needed to restore her opportunity for balance! So may people come to it smoothly and sweetly by the mere living of life. Only the headstrong and prideful need the drastic.

Her whole life had been centred in her so-important material activities. Now they had been for the moment completely thrust aside. By the great law of compensation Nature began to develop another part of her. Her former preoccupations and mental dominations no longer acted as a stricture. Minnie's spirit was like something stretching, something yawning and deep-sighing back into life. It was a starved and inadequate thing; a pathetic weakling. But it lived; and it is law that, though it may again be submerged, that which has spiritual life never dies, and never loses the little strength it may have gained.

VIII

Those who have had the elementary experience of half-frozen fingers know that real suffering comes with awakening. The impact of a blow brings its merciful numbness.

The pangs of reawakening life! Poor Minnie: a terrible state! The reviving pains almost threw her back into her old

intellectual surety. Only the recoil of memory-horror prevented her from returning to it. She was wracked, and torn, and beaten down. In like case many—indeed, most—fall into utter defeat. Only the inherent energy of her nature saved her from that. The struggle was like an unending physical agony. She could see no future happiness; only a rawness, as though the very quick of her had been exposed.

It is a terrible thing to awaken; it is a terrible thing to become, late in life, for the first time spiritually aware; that side of the human entity at last aroused, suffering from its cramping arrestment, but brought to life so that it cannot again be extinguished! With all the strength of which it is capable, it fights against that which lulls or blights or coerces it again into complete stagnation. Relentlessly, incessantly it suffers its way back toward health.

Only too gladly would Minnie have returned to the old comfort of her controlled mechanism of intellectual life; but she could not. That, too, was gone from her grasp. Racked and raw and harassed and tormented, with, on one side, faculties wounded almost to the death, and on the other, faculties feeble in new beginnings, she tragically tried to force herself to grasp again what she knew as life.

And the help that had been patiently waiting for this moment was withdrawn. Cousin Jim was ill of what was then known as *la grippe* and was so closely confined that for a week Minnie could no more than see him.

IX

Sometime with each, now or hereafter, the soul must quicken or immortality fail. Cousin Jim had felt vaguely for the truth when he had told Fred that delay bore compound interest of effort and suffering. Any one who wishes may go to sleep; but he must not forget the awakening.

CHAPTER LXVI

THE usual group was seated around the nineteenth hole at the Country Club, sipping long cool drinks, for the summer had turned hot. After the froth had blown off the conversation, and each man had been given a reasonable time—according to his importance in the community—to tell just how he did or didn't or should have done on the links, the talk veered to that ever-fresh topic, the Kirbys.

The Kirbys had been objects of discussion from the moment old Uncle Ezekiel Kirby had knocked their eye out on Madison Street these many years ago. Zozo's spectacular end in a collision with an unseen farmer's wagon debouching at right angles from a lane had given the community its biggest thrill since the Civil War. The comment had ranged from the rather triumphant I-told-you-sos by the envious, the small-minded, and those the youth had scared half to death by his driving, to a pitying and aghast understanding on the part of those with insight. The closing of the palace gates and Minnie's complete seclusion, after the first momentary reaction on the part of those who considered themselves her intimates, had been accepted as the appropriate thing to do. But now that two months or more had gone by, it was felt the thing was being overdone. The aforesaid intimates professed themselves as anxious about Minnie's health, her condition of mind; they thought she should be making an effort. She was in danger of falling into a "state." Some even whispered to each other that Minnie had always been a little inclined to pose—of course her grief was natural and genuine enough—an only son, and the heir—but——

The men, in a directer fashion, were interested in Fred. The latter was not in seclusion; he went down to his business every morning and was to be seen in his office by any one who had affair there. But he was to be found nowhere else. His old occasional habit of joining the long table at the Iroquois Club for lunch had fallen into abeyance. Never was he seen on the links.

"He ought to get out," stated Pine with emphasis. "No man

can live the life he does. No exercise. And our old foursome is all shot to pieces. Of course, I appreciate how he feels and all that; but just the same he ought to begin to make an effort. Somebody ought to tackle him."

"Why don't you?" asked Atkins bluntly.

"I've thought of it a half-a-dozen times when I've been up to his office on business. But, dog-gone it, there's something about him that stops me. He seems about a thousand miles away."

"Well," observed Pine after an interval, "I do wish he'd stir out a little. It's time. Of course, I understand he's hit hard. But—I don't mean to be unkind—but it really isn't quite—quite—well, *manly* to bury yourself completely in grief—like a woman. Of course, Mrs. Kirby, naturally——"

Bob Post spoke up quietly from his corner of the room.

"I think you are wrong there."

They turned toward him.

"How many of you have seen him and talked to him?"

It developed that of those present only Atkins and Pine had had occasion to visit the office. Many others had seen him driving his roadster.

"No, that isn't what I mean. I mean face to face. Well, I've done considerable business for him lately. He is not sunk in grief, as you mean it. Mr. Pine expressed it: he is a thousand miles away. What he is doing there, I do not know; but I hazard the guess he is figuring on something."

"Figuring on something?" repeated Atkins, who had been listening attentively. "What do you mean, Bob? Business?"

"No, I mean on himself, the situation somehow. It isn't exactly figuring. It's—it's—*listening*, by George! He's holding himself very still and listening."

Pine hooted. The others laughed. This was another of Bob Post's fantastic "flights."

"Listening! What are you giving us? Listening to what?" snorted the banker. "Bob, for a pretty good lawyer you're talking foolish!"

But the old ironmaster did not join in his derision. A vagueness had dimmed his hard bright eye. It was as though he groped for something he could almost understand. After a moment he gave it up. But he continued to look toward the lawyer with a new respect.

CHAPTER LXVII

I

BOB POST had struck close to the truth but had not quite hit it accurately. Fred was not so much listening as going with the sweep of a current and awaiting attentively its goal. He had no mental process; he had no attitude of mind: he had merely what might be called an attitude of soul. He did have certain dim realizations. One of them was the pressure of this great unmoral force. Somehow, with Zozo's death, the responsibility had been thrown back on him alone. The outlet through the future heir, with which vaguely he had comforted himself, was closed. The buck could no longer be passed, even partly, to a new generation.

The thing lurked in the background. Fred did not even know what it was. But it was almost like a portentous presence, this great pent-up thing which must eventually be loosed to build or destroy according to the wisdom of a man's judgment. It must be repeated that Fred, as far as his thinking consciousness was concerned, faced no problem of wealth. But its pressure was there, none the less; and the responsibility hurried his evolution. The current quickened. Still, attentive, he passed within these few weeks the landmarks of years.

II

Much of his time at the office he sat staring at the wall as though in a daydream. Necessary affairs he performed perfunctorily, or delegated to others. His personnel found him, as had Pine, a thousand miles away. Punctually at five he closed his desk. In his roadster he went directly home. Somehow even his old visits to Cousin Jim had lost their significance. The Five Thousand Dollar Gates clanged to behind him and he was no more seen until the next day.

After leaving the car at the garage, he wandered down toward the Lake. His greetings to the gardeners and outdoor men were

of the briefest, quite in contrast to the old days when he had liked nothing better than to chat expansively after his hearty manner. His favourite spot was a stone bench on the Italian terrace, which commanded a narrow open vista of the Lake, and the flicker of bright waters through a fringe of shore trees. Here, with the instinctive tact of the simple, the men never intruded when he was at home.

Only at the latest possible moment did he enter the house.

It was so quiet. The big rooms were full of an hypnotic silence of eternity, like the brooding quiet of great woods. Spirits seemed to hover there; those spirits which take of the material of eternity as it is prepared for them through human lives, and with it fashion humanly understandable things. Something hung in suspension, full of portent, waiting for the quickening touch, if it should come.

Fred passed through quickly. He was not ready yet.

III

Unable to bear the great brooding vacancies of the rooms, Minnie had closed the larger part of the house; and they now lived in what, in happier circumstances, they might have called "old-fashioned comfort" in a few ground-floor rooms. Cousin Jim had suggested that, before he had fallen ill. They felt there a good deal like visitors in their own house.

Fred greeted Minnie with a commonplace remark. Minnie was dressed in the deepest black, and she never smiled. Bereavement was in danger with her of becoming a cult. She had almost enshrined the personal effects of Zozo; fingering them over, laying them away in neat order, indulging in a wallow of unrestrained reminiscence over each one. The peril of this over-prolonged dwelling with the memory of the dead is the more insidious in that it possesses a certain element of piety. Objections to it are almost impossible. If ventured they seem like desecrations. And deep down—oh, very deep down, so that never does it arise to recognition—is an appeal to that arch-enemy of the soul's progress, the feeling of self. The maiden mourning her dead love on through all her years, treated tenderly and forbearingly, receiving especial consideration because of her loss, is a little of a romantic figure. The mother nursing her grief as a thing apart from existence; the widow trailing her shadow across the bright surface of life, arrive at last at a delicate balance between reality and pose. Hard

words, but true. Grief is grief, and loss is loss, and both are sacred. But only if their dark threads are woven into the pattern of which everyday human life is made.

IV

To one less withdrawn from his surroundings than Fred the external situation would have been intolerable. The hushed servants, the muffled footsteps, the still thick gloom of the great house were as though Zozo yet lay in state in the big drawing room. But he did not notice. These two human beings met and ate together and sat together almost unconscious of each other's presence. Not only was each wholly occupied with his own inner self, but neither for the moment had need of anything the other could offer.

After Minnie had retired to her own room, Fred sat and smoked or prowled about. Round and about through the big silent rooms he wandered, sometimes in the twilight, sometimes turning on a dim rare light here and there. The fall of his footsteps echoed hollowly. Occasionally he stood stock still, and then the sound of the great clock ticking its relentless intervals of time filled the spaces. At such moments the intent preoccupation seemed to lift from him, and he looked about him wonderingly as though taking stock of things seen for the first time.

Though dazed and wondering, he moved forward because he had always moved. Minnie had stopped short because for years, in spite of all her brilliant activity, she had scarcely moved at all.

CHAPTER LXVIII

I

IT WAS late in the afternoon. Cousin Jim, recovered from his illness, was making his first visit to the palace. His heart was low and his keen old eyes were sad. Cousin Jim was a simple soul, but he had gathered wisdom in his own life search for the spiritual values, and he had learned to gauge small significances. During his illness he had received many attentions from the palace. Chicken broths piping hot, trembling jellies icy cold, a trained nurse who would not be denied, loads of flowers fresh almost every day—all were forthcoming. But Cousin Jim, without the slightest cynicism, guessed the origin of them all as a single command to the super-capable Jean. Minnie herself did not appear; nor did Cousin Jim delude himself that he was even more than momentarily in her thoughts. He was not in the slightest degree hurt by this; he was only disappointed. And he was not disappointed on his own account, but only that the symptom was bad. Minnie was still in the dark room of her own long fashioning.

Fred dropped in every day; and after the crisis of the disease had passed, he sat for an hour or so by the bedside, or—later—by the armchair near the fireplace. He had very little to say for himself, but he was companionable. Cousin Jim had very little to say either. Once he asked a question.

"What's on your mind these days, Fred?"

"Money," returned Fred briefly.

Cousin Jim considered this.

"Yes?" he urged after a little.

"What it's for—a lot of it, that is. Whether there should be a lot of it."

"Yes?" repeated Cousin Jim.

"There should be," stated Fred decidedly. "Money is like people. A single man is all right; but there are some things that can't be done without a lot of people working together. Some things can't be done without a lot of money."

"Good and bad," supplied Cousin Jim.

"Misuse is no argument against the possibility of right use. Nor against its necessity."

"That is true."

"It's got to be collected in order to do the big things."

"The monumental utilities," supplied Cousin Jim.

"Eh?"

"It demonstrates the power of unity beyond the capacity of the individual."

"That's the idea: you express it better than I do. That's where colleges or cathedrals or fine court houses or hospitals or water storage or any of those things come from—a collective wealth. She's accumulated, and she's distributed again. That's clear to me. And another point is clear—that the fellow who just wants to distribute it back to the dead level again is stupid."

"My head isn't very clear yet——" apologized Cousin Jim.

"Without its doing its work on the way," supplied Fred.

"Yes, I see," conceded Cousin Jim, "but what——?"

"That's as far as I've got. But the meaning of life is there—for me—in that money. Life *must* always have some meaning. It *must*! I thought I had found it—and I had—but it was—well, it was taken away——"

Cousin Jim laid his hand on Fred's arm.

"And," went on the latter resolutely, "I've got to find it, that's all!" He paused. "Look here, Jim, what would *you* do if all this wealth were yours?"

The shock of the impact was tremendous. A great panic expanded his soul to a vast and echoing void. He stared at Fred, dazed.

The nurse came into the room, took one glance at her patient, and hustled Fred out.

"Too much talk. You've excited him. It won't do," she told Fred in the hall.

"I'm sorry," he muttered. "I'll be more careful next time."

II

There had been altogether too much discussion. Cousin Jim had a haunted relapse. What *would* he have done? What *would* he do?

Many years ago he, too, had lost the meaning of life—it had been "taken away," as Fred had expressed it. He had sought it

again in the materials of which his own life was made. And, to a degree, he had found it. But how did that help Fred? What in fundamental had he discovered for himself—if anything?

If it were fundamental, it should be translatable into the terms of any man's problem, rich or poor, high or low, old or young. Everybody did not want to live as simply and quietly as he did; it was proper that they should not. He had no right to make his own conditions and test a general inclusive philosophy by them. It must be tested in all conditions, if it were true. If it were after all only a personal thing for his own spiritual well-being alone, then he was exactly what most people thought him—a lazy, selfish, sterile old loafer!

Cousin Jim sat bolt upright, his hands tight-locked together. What would he have done? It was no academic question: it measured the value of his life. It was as swift and shattering in its way as had been to Minnie the engulfing sorrow of Zozo's death; or the rending change of a physical disability, like blindness; or sudden dire poverty. It tested the philosophical insurance he had been taking out through the years, his real capacity and reserve strength for emergencies, the actual fibre that endures.

He could not answer it, and a panic invaded his soul. Frantically he grasped at details, and they bent in his hands like reeds. That did no good. He could tell himself with conviction that if he had all that money he wouldn't be such a chump as to build a palace, or buy eight motor cars, or keep twenty servants. But that got him nowhere. It was not a question of negatives. It was a question of the whole direction of an enormous force.

But though details eluded him, broad flashes of insight swept his landscape like sheet lightning. As though this initial stepping outside himself had cleared his vision, he discovered that his old dismissal of wealth would not do. Easy enough to say that all this would not have happened if Zozo had been the son of a man in commendably moderate circumstances. He was not: and Cousin Jim saw that moderate circumstances were not necessarily commendable.

In his weakened condition these things became a nightmare in his brain; the fever came back; the nurse summoned the doctor. They called it a relapse. Fred, presenting himself at the usual hour next day, was only doubtfully admitted, and then under rigid orders as to conversation.

But his visit did Cousin Jim enormous good. The old man,

once more in bed, his mind dazed by fever and drugs, nevertheless looked across at the square solid figure with a calming satisfaction. A strange lucidity of perception seemed to have taken the place of his ordinary mental processes. Fred was lost and groping and suffering, after his dumb fashion, but he was moving forward—because he had always moved. He was all right. It might take long, but he would arrive. Where? How? It eluded Cousin Jim, but he did not care. He closed his eyes, contented.

III

But as he gained strength a new uneasiness invaded his soul. The same clairvoyant lucidity had failed to reassure him in the other direction. He must get well; he must see Minnie.

He found her in the small sitting room, and at his first glance his heart stirred within him. The direction of her drift was plain. Only too obviously the moment with her was passing. Over the molten living surface of her spirit slowly was reforming the dead crust of new habit that as of old would again, a hard and impervious insulation, confine it from quickening. A duller perception than his might have found encouragement in indication of small renewed outside interests that Minnie was recovering, that she was beginning once more to "take notice." She spoke of this or that arrangement in the household; she mentioned an intention or so for the future. But it was only the old thing muted; the old life regrouping around a sacred grief; the old powers deflected to the service of a thing that was dead. Consciousness, painfully awakened, had but turned to wrap itself again in the ceremonies of its self-contemplation.

Cousin Jim's spirits sank. Suddenly he felt very old. He who thought he had possessed the richnesses of life found that when he would offer them, they dissolved in his hands, like the impalpable substance of dreams, and in their place had come this fire-snorting dragon that had defied his power of peace and upset his adjustments. His nearest in blood were entangled in the service of the dragon. No power he possessed or could invoke could reach them.

A great self-condemnation took possession of Cousin Jim. He, too, felt the draw of the vortex.

IV

How long these two sat there together, but each as alone as

though at opposite poles, neither could have told. The sun was already slanting through the tops of the poplar trees outside, and the light in the dimmed sitting room was imperceptibly fading. It seemed impossible that human beings could sit rigidly motionless for so long a period.

Then Cousin Jim stirred. He threw his head up as though questing, almost as a dog sniffs the air. In some mysterious way, through some sixth sense released by the clairvoyance of these searching moments, he had become aware of something. It was not a hope; it was a certainty, but of what it was a certainty he could not have told. The darkness had lifted faintly, a little wind of coming had breathed across the dead air. His spirit arose passionately to meet it. An answer to his need was on the way. New life stirred in him, a new confidence, a fresh faith. He waited.

At that precise moment Fred, who had been sitting idly in his motionless roadster, suddenly squared his shoulders, sat bolt upright, and jammed his heel on the self-starter of his car.

"All right, my son. *Yes!*" he cried aloud.

His listening was over: he had heard the Whisper.

CHAPTER LXIX

I

SOMEWHERE in the house a door was banged shut vigorously. Minnie started, clasping a hand to her heart. She cast a look of vexation toward Cousin Jim as she reached toward a bell. Before she could press it the door of the room opened and Fred appeared.

"Did you happen to see who banged that door so?" Minnie demanded of him in the hushed tones she had lately adopted.

"Yes," answered Fred in his loud natural voice, "I did."

"*Couldn't* you be more careful, considering——"

"Yes," he interrupted, "I suppose I could. But it don't matter."

He crossed the room and jerked aside the heavy curtains that had been drawn to impart a funereal dimness. The late afternoon sunlight streamed in. Minnie uttered a shocked protest. Fred turned to face them both.

It was a changed Fred. Obviously he had come back from the thousand miles away. He stood before them vital, purposeful, and very much in earnest about something. Cousin Jim sat up straight.

"Look here," said Fred, "I've decided one thing, and that is that this thing has got to stop right here. It can't go on this way. The house is like a morgue. It's time we had some sunlight, and talked out loud, and slammed a few doors. And we're going to do it!"

Minnie half arose.

"How can you, Fred! How can you talk that way so soon after—— How can you be so heartless!"

She began to weep.

"And stop that," went on Fred, though less impetuously; and then, as Minnie failed to obey, his voice hardened. "We're a rank lot of cowards. We've all come a crash, a bad one——every one of us as well as Zozo. And instead of picking ourselves up

and trying to see what we should do about it, we're quitting like a lot of yellow dogs. This is no way to live. House shut up like a tomb! About as cheerful as a prayer meeting!"

"Cheerful!" Minnie caught up the word indignantly. Her spirit was rising, and she wadded her handkerchief into a ball. "What are you saying? Is the loss of your only son nothing to you that you talk of being cheerful? You are brutal!"

"I am not brutal: I am sensible!" he shot back. "I'm sick of this God's-will-be-done attitude. God's will! Do you think God just capriciously made up His mind to take Zozo and did it; and that we're just supposed to accept the fact? Not any! It's God's will that we pay for foolishness, every clip; and we have. Yes—we have——" He stopped short for a moment, and his voice dropped. Then he flung his head back, squared his shoulders, and took up his stride. He flung his arm out toward where Cousin Jim sat rigidly motionless, his attentive eyes fixed unwaveringly on the speaker's face. "Jim!"

"Yes, Fred."

"You know. We brought Zozo up like fools. What happened was just the natural result."

"Fred!" shrieked Minnie, "you don't know what you are saying!"

"I know what I am saying. It has taken me a long time to see it. I see it now. We brought Zozo up like fools; and now we haven't guts enough to face the fact."

"I am not going to stay here to hear such talk!" cried Minnie, ablaze with wrath.

Fred again stopped and extended his arm.

"Sit down!" he commanded with authority.

Minnie stared at him. And the little hushed instant that followed witnessed one of the great readjustments of life; one of those readjustments prepared through years but sliding into place with the barely audible click of smooth, well-oiled machinery. In every human association there must be the leader, the one who plans, who establishes direction and aim. In the Kirby association, at that moment, a long-held leadership passed. When Minnie, astonished and overborne, had sunk back to her chair, grasping desperately for some rag-tag of her dignity, Fred indirectly expressed this thought.

"I've played this game the way I was supposed to play it just as long as I'm going to," said he, "and one hell of a life I've led!

We've done this, and we've done that, and we haven't done the other thing because that's the way it's supposed to be. Everybody's done my thinking for me."

Minnie was at last aroused.

"I must say I think I have conducted——" she began, but Fred overbore her.

"I am not blaming you: I'm blaming myself. We have led the life we were supposed to lead. People in our position—that's the expression. And what have we got out of it? We haven't done one thing we wanted to: we've worked like dogs, and we're dissatisfied as hell!"

"Speak for yourself," put in Minnie.

"I'm speaking for you, too," shot back Fred. "With all the things you've done, and the things you've bought, and the things you've worked at, you were dissatisfied as hell. I'm not considering Zozo's death. Before that. Now weren't you?"

"No one is ever quite satisfied," replied Minnie on the defensive, "I was as satisfied as the average."

"Well, why shouldn't you have been more satisfied than the average? Hadn't you every reason to be? No! I tell you. We've landed on flat failure. I'm man enough to acknowledge it; and I believe you are. Well, what are you going to do about it? Call it human nature? Lie down and quit? Make a fresh start doing the same old things all over again? Well, I'm not!" The door opened noiselessly, and a man-servant appeared.

"Would Madame have tea served?" he enquired in hushed tones.

"No!" shouted Fred vehemently. "Get out of here and stay out!"

The butler, startled almost out of his senses, backed hastily away.

II

Fred drew a deep breath and relaxed his tense muscles.

"No, no," he went on more calmly. "It won't do. What have I been doing all this time? I've been working ten hours a day just trying to dig out; working harder than any man in this town. I've had clothes out of it, and food, and a good place to sleep; but, by God, I haven't even gone duck shooting with Cousin Jim! And what have you got out of it? You've buzzed around and made yourself a nervous wreck. I'm talking about before Zozo died. What good has all this gimcrack stuff done you? Be

honest: weren't you happier when we lived in the little house below the Hill?"

Minnie dropped her head.

"Oh, yes, Fred; that is true. *It is true.* It's all this dreadful money! If it hadn't been for that, all this would never have happened. You are right. Oh, I wish I had never seen a cent of it!"

"Well, I don't," denied Fred flatly. "The money is all right. It's a good thing to have: but we haven't made it a good thing. I've been a fool, but I haven't been a coward. You can't gain anything by dodging things and getting off in a corner where nothing can happen to you. It isn't the fault of the money at all: it's my fault. But I knew enough to learn. Cousin Jim has taught me—yes, you have! I'm going to make a fresh start, and I'm going to use some sense in it this time."

Minnie looked up hopefully. His whole being radiated confidence and energy.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I'm going to *work*, by gad; and I'm going to work along my own lines—what I should have done from the start!"

"Work!" she repeated, dazed. "But you have been working—too much—that's what you said."

Cousin Jim felt for his pouch and pipe and began to fill the latter; but he did it by sense of touch. His eyes never left Fred's face.

"Work!" echoed Fred with contempt. "I've been working the way a man does who has to bail a boat to keep it afloat. That isn't work: it's slavery."

He sat down and leaned forward more quietly.

"You see it isn't so much the work itself—what I do, I mean. It's whether or not it gives life a meaning. We made Zozo the meaning of life, and he was a big meaning that might have meant much. But—" he faltered, then resumed—"that meaning is no longer here. And as life still goes on, it must have a meaning. It would be silly to suppose otherwise."

"You're quite a philosopher, aren't you," interposed Minnie.

Fred chuckled, surprised at the bitterness of her tone.

"What meaning can life have for me?" she answered his look. "I've worked and slaved and given up my best years—yes, and my very best intelligence—for all you say—and now it is all snatched away. It is unfair! unjust!" She began to weep. "Tell me what meaning life can have for me, at my age!"

"Why, Minnie; I wish I could," rejoined Fred gently, "but I believe each person has to find that out for himself. I don't believe anybody can help, when the time comes. It's only before the time comes that they can help. But it is there: I know that." He paused to collect his ideas. "I never had to think these things out before," he resumed. "I'm not used to it; I don't say it very well."

"I think you are saying it *mighty* well," said Cousin Jim.

"What I mean is that you can help a man get ready to think, but you can't think for him. You helped me get ready, Jim. I can see now that the worst thing in the world is to try to do somebody else's thinking for him. That was our trouble with Zozo. We tried to do all his thinking for him."

"But one must establish habits of mind—one must have discipline and order——"

"Of course. That isn't the sort of thing I mean. Let's not talk about that now."

"You are right about advice, Fred," interposed Cousin Jim, "but I would like to have your idea."

"Yes, I'd like to hear what you have found that will take the place of your own son," supplemented Minnie, still with bitterness. "I might like to adopt it myself."

"It's only for me—it wouldn't do for any one else. I think, as I said, that each has to do this sort of thing for himself. It's individual."

"Let's have it, just the same," urged Cousin Jim.

"It's in work, but my kind of work. I've figured it out. I'm going to produce something. I haven't been doing that: I've just been taking care of something. I've been a slave to this fortune of ours. I've tried to keep it up in shipshape fashion, and keep it invested to the best advantage, and managed to the best of my business ability. That took all of my time and energy. I somehow felt I had an obligation to it. As long as I thought I could see a future for it, that was all right. I didn't like it and I was tired out from it, but I was willing to go on with it for the sake of that future."

"But now, what's the good? I don't want any more money. I don't want anywhere near as much money. Do you?" he challenged Minnie.

"Heaven knows I don't want money!" cried Minnie fervently. "As far as I am concerned I wouldn't care if I never saw another

cent of it. I wish we'd never seen it. I wish we *were* back living simply in the little house under the Hill! Then all this would never have happened!"

"How do you know?" demanded Fred. "Anyway, we've got the money, and we're going to keep on having it. And it's a responsibility. It's up to us whether we like it or not. It's—it's like water collected behind a dam." He repeated the idea he had expressed to Cousin Jim. "Maybe we ought to return it to the level it was raised from—I don't know; but if so we ought to use its power on the way down. That's what accumulations of any kind are *for*. You know, I talked to you about it," he appealed to Cousin Jim.

"I know," said Cousin Jim. "Philanthropy, you mean, or foundations, or public works."

"Perhaps so—for some people that may be the way; but it would not do for me. Not as a *meaning* of life. That would be just giving other people a chance to do something. The most I would be doing would be to pick those other fellows. No, I've got to do something myself."

"Have you decided what it is to be, Fred?" asked Cousin Jim.

"Yes, I have. First of all, as I said, I'm going to quit bothering my head about this fortune of ours. It'll get on quite well. I have no obligation toward it; it has an obligation toward me. It can go hang. I don't give a damn whether it is invested, or lies in the bank, or draws interest, or is buried in an old sock until I've grown big enough in my own way to use it. I don't give a damn whether it brings all the return it ought to. I don't give a damn whether it increases or diminishes or stands still. I refuse to be ridden by it. It won't disappear. It will get on well enough. It did in Uncle Ezekiel's lifetime. I've increased it a lot since then; but why in blazes should it be increased? It won't hurt if it decreases. There'll be enough and more than enough."

"You get your freedom," observed Cousin Jim. "That's a good idea. What will you do with it?"

"That's the point. I'm going into business; I mean *real* business—making things that people want. I'm going to start small enough so I can handle it, and I'm going to use from this fortune of ours just as much as I can swing comfortably in that business. It may be only ten thousand a year at first—I don't know—and it may be a hundred thousand—it doesn't matter. The rest of it can go hang."

"'Bury it in a sock,' you said," remarked Cousin Jim thoughtfully. "I don't know: is that quite fair? The need for capital——"

"Oh, it won't be out of use," said Fred impatiently. "The banks will take care of that. But I'm out of it. I refuse to feel responsible for any more of it than I can *use*, productively. I haven't been using any of it productively. I haven't produced a damn thing. I've just fulfilled my 'obligations,' and I'm not going to do it any more."

"You said it was a responsibility," struck in Minnie, a note of scorn in her voice. "I must say I can't see how going into business helps that, except that it occupies you with something you like to do. Why should you go into business?"

Fred looked at her, pained.

"It isn't to amuse myself," said he, "nor just to keep busy. It's to produce what people want. I'm going to look around and find something people need more than anything else, and I'm going to manufacture that for them as cheaply as possible. And I'm not sure I'll pick out what you'd call a 'necessity,' either," he added. "It may be some frill, some silly thing that adds to the joy of life, and that everybody'd like to have if they could only afford it. Well, I'm going to make it so they can afford it. I'm going to make it so they can get it cheap and easy. I'm going to concentrate on that, and I'm going to use just as much of this darned money as I need to do that, and not a cent more, and I'm not going to feel one pennyweight of responsibility for the rest. And as what I do expands," he repeated his first idea, "and I work into it, I'll be able to use more and more of it. Maybe in time I can use all of it. I don't know."

"Of course you can do that, Fred," conceded Cousin Jim, doubtfully. "With unlimited capital and no regard for losses you can undoubtedly make whatever you please and sell it for what you please. Sort of indirect philanthropy."

At the word Fred fired up again.

"Philanthropy! Hell and blue blazes! What earthly good would it do as philanthropy? If it doesn't make me a good profit, it isn't worth doing. Worse than that. It would upset all sorts of business."

He calmed down; fumbled for a cigar; lighted it; leaned back.

"You don't get my point. Any man with money enough can produce things cheaply—at a loss. And sell them cheaper than

any one else—at a loss. In that case, will you answer me this? Why not go a step farther and make them for nothing—*give* them away?"

"Well, why not?" challenged Minnie.

"Bad for people. Bad for everybody. Upsets the whole balance of industry. About as silly as these model farms. No; what I want to do is to show that things can be manufactured cheaper and at the same time make a profit. That's where all this fool money comes in."

"I'm afraid you're not very clear, Fred," said Cousin Jim.

"Well, look here. Why aren't most things made more cheaply? Because of poor methods. Why do people stick to poor methods? Because those methods are the only ones they are *sure* of. They have been arrived at by experience, and they work well enough, after a fashion. To improve on them means experiment, and experiments cost money. Furthermore, nine experiments in ten are failures, and failures cost money, too. The man of limited capital can't take a loss; he'd better stick by old methods, even if they are not as good as they might be and mean high prices. That clear?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I propose to make those experiments and take that loss. I might spend a hundred thousand dollars just to prove that a certain article could be made fifty cents cheaper. Then I'd start business. I wouldn't charge in the hundred thousand. That would be my contribution. And, don't you see, not only will the public be getting the article cheaper; but every man who wanted to go into that business could take free advantage of my experience and make it fifty cents cheaper, too—at the same profit to himself."

"A sort of free industrial laboratory," commented Cousin Jim.

"That's the idea. And I'd go a little farther. I'd demonstrate. After I'd spent whatever was necessary in the experiments, I'd wipe the whole thing off the books—start a new set of them. I'd begin business right at that point under the new methods I'd worked out. *Then* if I didn't make a profit, the thing's a fizzle. If this thing hasn't got both feet on the dollar mark *then*, it's *worse* than useless. And it's no good unless other people in the industry can start at that point and do likewise. It must be repeatable. Don't you see?"

Cousin Jim nodded slowly, his eyes kindling.

"I think," added Fred, "that perhaps some such scheme is the only real excuse for a rich man's being in business at all. He certainly doesn't need the money. It's one of the few real excuses, anyway.

"You see," he repeated himself, "when the thing is square away I expect my profit. And I expect then I'd have the whole proposition in shape so that other people, with ordinary capital, can start right in and do it, too. Otherwise I've failed. Well, I'm not going to fail!"

"I see," said Cousin Jim.

"It ought to have been done long ago," resumed Fred, "in all directions. But the ordinary business man hasn't the capital to take a loss at first. He has to scrabble to keep ahead, and so he has to stick more or less to old and tried methods. And the average rich man is either out of business, or in big business, or simply can't see it. He takes his responsibility out in 'philanthropy,' as you call it. Well, this is philanthropy, too; but it's what I call *constructive* philanthropy. It builds up the whole industrial structure. It's got the common kind skinned a mile."

"It's a big thing," said Cousin Jim.

"It may be a big thing," Fred corrected. "At first it's going to be a small thing, because I'm going to start it myself and run it myself—with the best help I can get. And I'm going to keep it small enough so I can handle it. That's the only way I can find out. I'm not going to be buffaloeed by that twelve million dollars into the idea that I've got to do something big. That's the trouble—size, size, size, before we've grown up to it! Do you know what I've been doing? I've been putting every ounce of my energy into working overtime clipping coupons off other men's industry, and investing my surplus into supplying capital for other men to work with. I'm *through*! That's not my obligation."

III

"That's how I've worked it out," said Fred deprecatingly, after a slight pause. "I know it don't amount to much, and it probably wouldn't work for anybody but me. But I'm interested in it, and I'm going to it; and when I get through—if it works out—I'll feel that I've done something useful with part of this money, at least. I believe each person has to work it out for himself—a meaning for life."

Minnie had listened in a sort of bitter and half-scornful de-

tachment, but her brain was still keen enough not only to follow the essentials of Fred's scheme but to see in what way it answered his own particular needs for an outlet. But it was after all sordidly commercial, she told herself, just business in a new guise. How could it have any application to herself? She felt more alone than ever.

"How about me?" she complained. "That is all very fine, but how about me? Oh, I'm so sick of it all!" She threw her hands out. "I've worked so hard, and it's brought me so little! I'm tired of it, *tired*, I tell you!" she cried fiercely.

"What do you want to do, Minnie?" asked Fred with great gentleness, "get rid of it? All right: if you want to. Or travel, if you want to. Do anything that will satisfy you."

"I don't know what I want. I have no business, as you have."

Cousin Jim spoke up unexpectedly.

"Sometimes your business is pretty obvious—the main outline of it," said he. "Sometimes it is thrust upon you."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Minnie.

"Yours is being a wealthy woman," stated Cousin Jim.

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" cried Minnie, throwing her hands out in impatient despair.

"I'm not so impractical in saying that as you think," insisted Cousin Jim. "It's a job, if you look at it right. You've dabbled away at it for some years, but you haven't really worked at it."

"I'd like to throw the whole thing overboard!"

Fred was staring at the two of them, an idea dawning.

"Hold on!" he interposed. "By Jove, I never thought of it. Cousin Jim is right. And your whole trouble has been just exactly what my trouble was. It's the same thing exactly. It's been eating you alive. You got to be a nervous wreck just running this place and seeing that you gave enough parties in it, and that all its facilities were used to the limit, and that all the servants kept busy and didn't loaf on the job. And all the rest of it. Isn't that right? And now for the past three months you haven't done a darn thing but sit in a room. You've let it all go hang. It's still here, and it's still running along all right, isn't it?"

"Oh, but you don't understand!" cried Minnie, stung.

"Oh, perhaps some of the servants have loafed on the job or swiped the cigars. Perhaps some of the bills *have* been higher than they would have been. Perhaps maybe you *haven't* received for every dollar what would be a dollar's worth to someone less

wealthy than ourselves. What of it? Doesn't that little fact teach you something? I'm going to forget all the money I can't use in my *business*. Why don't you forget all the stuff you can't use in yours? Probably as time goes on you can—like me—use more and more."

"But what can I *do*?" demanded Minnie.

"That you must find out. I don't know. I wish I did. But it's got to be something constructive, something—I don't know——" Fred was floundering. He was not used to self-expression.

"It's service," supplied Cousin Jim. "That's what makes the job that is satisfactory. As soon as we have our own feet under us we've got to help other people get their feet under them."

Minnie moved impatiently.

"I loathe the very thought of philanthropy and slum work and scholarships and education. I'm sick of them!"

"Then they are not your job," said Fred. "Look here; Cousin Jim is right. Your main job is being a rich woman, just as mine is being a rich man. Make a start on that, a small start, just as I am doing. The first thing I see to do is to buy my freedom—at any price—my freedom of energy by paying competent men to take care of this blanked property, whether they do it as well as I could, or not. You'd better do the same. Get a manager, or six housekeepers, or whatever will give you your freedom. It isn't going to be so easy at first. It's going to be slow doing, but it's something I for one will be able to throw myself into with some enthusiasm and feel like a man while I'm doing it. I want to see ahead and be working for something big that isn't myself. I've got to, I tell you; I've *got* to!" His voice rose and almost broke in tension. "Great snakes and fish-hooks! I wish I'd thrown off this weight years ago: I feel like a boy again!"

He paused, regained control of himself, and went on:

"But start small. I don't give a darn what it is, but do it; and don't think you've got to do it big just because you've got the materials. Do it only as big as you can."

Cousin Jim hammered the table.

"And remember to be as rich as the next fellow while you're doing it," concluded Fred.

"I don't see where you're helping me in the slightest degree!" cried Minnie hopelessly.

"We've been rich people for quite some time now," said Fred, "and we haven't made much of a fist at it. We've made mistakes

all along the line. Now at least we know they were mistakes; at least we know that *that* isn't the way to be a rich person. And let me tell you this right here and now; all this stuff"—he waved his hand about him—"and parties, and cars, and travel, and all your artistic stunts are part of it. Lots of people have money, heaps of money. Those people aren't going to give it away or quit living luxuriously. They're going right on spending it, the way they always have. So it isn't going to do the slightest bit of good for you to give up all this stuff. Every time some dub runs against grief and tribulation, he 'renounces the luxuries of wealth,' as he calls it; and thinks he's done something noble. Rats! How does that help the fellow who doesn't want to renounce? Why should he renounce? That won't get you anywhere. You've got to go on living the life of a wealthy person with all the frills; only you've got to live it somehow so you can avoid the old mistakes. Show 'em it can be done. See what I mean?"

"Yes—I think so," said Minnie doubtfully, "but what shall I *do*?"

The illumination that had come to Fred struck but the faintest reflection from her darkened surfaces. One of the profoundest of truths is that one individual can communicate to another nothing that he does not already know. He may not heretofore have recognized it in the conscious part of his brain, but he must have acquired its essence by his own inner processes of life and growth. Spiritually Minnie, for all her energy and activity and cleverness, had prepared no sensitized plates to receive such impressions. She was bewildered and impatient.

"Service!" she said impatiently, "I'm so sick of those old platitudes!"

Then Fred, in the white-hot fusion of his long-prepared expansion, made an epigram. He would have been astonished and incredulous had any one accused him of it.

"Life is finding out in just what way platitudes are true," said he. He arose and abruptly left the room.

CHAPTER LXX

I

Cousin JIM stared after him, his eyes shining. He saw beyond the petty details of a new kind of commercial experiment to the profound spiritual causes that had produced it. Fire, water, earth, and air—the old elemental forces—acting by the laws of their being, produce an earthquake, or a dandelion. It is not the thing that is produced that matters, it is the offering to the Law a condition by which the great forces can move. So many lives, so much travail and weariness and pain, so much misunderstanding! For what?

That Fred Kirby should make one or another of civilization's toys cheaper than any one had ever made it before? Rather that spiritual forces should find their channel of action. No matter that the channel be small. The farthest stars felt the shift of those mighty powers.

He turned to catch Minnie's eyes fixed upon him, and stopped as short as though he had run against a wall.

"Don't you see, Minnie?" he pleaded. "He's got it."

"Oh, I suppose he's found something to interest him," she conceded wearily.

Cousin Jim sat down.

"He's done more than that; he's arrived at some rock-bottom truths of life."

"I don't know how that helps me."

"I don't know either, Minnie; but I think it will help you. It has helped me."

He went across the room to one of the bronze-grilled bookcases.

"I want to read you something," said he, returning with one of the volumes from a richly bound set. "This is one of those book-agent de-luxe sets of literary compendium we laughed at Fred so for getting, you remember. Well, it is a hodge-podge; but you run across fine out-of-the-way things. Here it is. It's a translation from an old Chinese sage."

He produced his spectacles, adjusted them, and began to read:

Search out your ambitions and contemplate them. Stand up and reveal yourself for what you are. Thus only is wisdom and self-direction obtainable. What have you to contribute of your distillation of life? What have you the strength to take of its enduring substances? Rally yourself; utilize your forces. A boundless universe of unimaginable rapture surrounds each one of us, seeking ever closer relationship, but overpowering the unfit.

The moment is *now* to acknowledge yourself slave or proclaim yourself master. Reckon the price of your progress to power. Pay it unflinchingly and graciously and richly and strongly, admitting your spirit's needs as generously as you admit those of the flesh. Face the slowly obtainable ultimate wisdom of divine consciousness.

Cousin Jim closed the book.

"That's great stuff, Minnie; and it's what Fred was saying, only in different words. It's got more energy to it than most oriental stuff: that's why I like it. Translated into modern slang it means, 'Let's go!'"

He returned the volume to its shelf and paused by the window. Cousin Jim seemed for the moment almost a young man—a tall figure, his head thrown back, his arms folded, every line of his body poised in strength. Minnie stared at him, astonished.

"I'd like to compose a chant of maturity," said he, "of the ripeness and richness and discovery of life. The heights and depths and effervescences of youth would seem very crude beside it. It's there, it's here, it's real. If I only had the courage to fling out the truth, to stand up before all men unashamed to acknowledge the greatness of ordinary everyday life; to strike on men's ears mightily with the murmur of the energy of great forces; to stimulate their vision to see the wealth of our possessions; to intoxicate their imaginations with the possibilities of individual achievement; to cause them to sense eternity now and here, in their own two hands." He turned toward her. "Minnie," he said solemnly, "life is never finished; life never pauses, no matter what happens. We continue—here and hereafter; and if we live the pursuing and exploring life, instead of the life in known confines, the drab and dreary and dismal thin before us like clearing mists. That is one of the profoundest truths I know."

He stared out of the window a few moments in silence.

"Look at that sunset, Minnie," he said in a quieter tone. "It's like rainbows, and all the other beautiful manifestations of life

that no power man wields can harvest to stow away as private possessions. Did you ever think why they are unharvestable?"

Minnie turned her head and fixed her eyes on him without answering.

"It's because we've got to be taught by such simple but unattainable playthings that there is another form of possession besides individual ownership. Why, when we take time to look around, the whole visible universe is a school for the higher education of the species. Only we won't study it. It bores us. Isn't that so?"

He reached over to touch her shoulder.

"You'll have to make the start, Minnie," he said gently, "and I am afraid you must make it all by yourself. I'm sorry," he stood for a moment with his hand on her arm. "I see Fred on the terrace," said he, "I think I'll go talk to him."

II

Minnie was left in the room, now falling to dusk. She stared straight before her, and for a little space of time swung poised in an almost clairvoyant vision, as though the illumination that had surrounded without penetrating her had at last by its glow enabled her to look within herself. It was a moment of release, like those she had experienced the day she had read the poem on the nightingale in Mrs. Pine's drawing room. What she saw frightened her.

Momentarily and fragmentarily she shared the insight of the two men. Values shifted for her. As a person who stands apart, she saw herself clearly. The realization would pass: she knew that, desperately. Hardly would it persist in recollection; certainly not with the force of a motive power. It was as though, on poised wings, she hovered above a murk into which shortly she must plunge, out of the pure upper sunlight.

She saw already the old crusts of habit forming, the fissures of this moment of escape closing inexorably. Fred and Cousin Jim had, more or less blindly, struggled upward in faith, though they had not understood; she had all her life built busily the walls that now confined her until at last her unaided strength was unequal to her desire to be free. In this moment of sublimation her separated self saw her other self clearly. She perceived that its best response would be a mere awkward acknowledgment of the failure of the old, and half-participation in the mere sensations of

the new. Its old uninterrupted and unproportioned habits of executive training and grasp of practical details had left a tight-muscled mind that could only with the greatest difficulty be made flexible again. Its desire for the old occupations and ambitions was gone, to be sure; but the condition bred of them remained. A mass of detail obstructed each step forward; and she was incapable of overleaping and grasping the thing itself without its minutiae. She might throw herself into a stress of patchwork reforms, but her character could not be instantaneously changed in substance. It had not the right kind of fibre—merely slowed down, not deflected—the adamant control of old habits obliterating new grooves not made sufficiently deep by natural unity of being—reversion to type——

She was appalled. And in her moment of poised wings, before dropping again into the murk of life, she, too, had her flash of illumination; she, too, saw a portion of pure truth; and it was this:

That the most tremendous of experiences leave little spiritual impression on those who have prepared for them no sensitive plates for their reception. The mere crash of event does little. It strikes across the consciousness—and is obliterated.

Minnie sprang from her chair in an agony. A dark menace seemed to threaten her, a menace from which she must escape at any cost of effort and struggle.

"Oh, Cousin Jim! Cousin Jim!" she cried passionately to the empty room.

She looked about her as though coming to.

"What a fool I am!" she told herself drearily.

III

Cousin Jim joined Fred where he stood on the Italian terrace, with its narrow vista of the Lake, and the gleam of reflected light showing through the trees. For a time they were silent.

"Jim," said Fred then, suddenly, "I've come alive, and you've done it, you old magician you!"

"I?" cried Cousin Jim.

"Yes, you. You've talked at me a lot in the last year or so. Perhaps you thought I wasn't listening, but I was. A good deal of what you said was away over my head, but some of it stuck; and even when I couldn't understand it, I knew it was the real

thing. You've got something most people have very little of, or have none of at all. I don't know clearly what it is, but I wish I had it. All people ought to have it. It's one of the ingredients of life, and when there's too little of any ingredient—*any at all*—life goes wrong. I suppose it's spirituality, though that's one of those rotten sanctimonious words."

Cousin Jim's face was transfigured, but he said nothing. A sorely needed justification of living seemed to have come to him in his own most doubtful hour.

"I've come alive," repeated Fred, "and I feel like a kid about it. Queer way to feel at my time of life, and considering all things, isn't it? I feel like a duck just out of its shell looking around for something I need—like water to swim in. Damn queer! What about it, you old incubator, you?"

He knocked the ashes from his pipe against the balustrade.

"Do you know," he continued, "if I were asked to make a statement of the assets and liabilities of my life to a company that was thinking of buying me out, from a business point of view, Jim, I'd be junk—junk—just junk! I can't help seeing things in columns—hideous, unbalanceable columns that torment me. If a good lively going young concern—call it the younger generation—were to come along and appraise me—dog-gone it, Jim; you are the fellow who disentangled me from——" He was incoherent and a little embarrassed. "Darn it all, Jim, you started me balancing my accounts in this new way; and it's darn uncomfortable! But when I've squared away, I'm going to put my back into paying up my debts."

"You're not so deep in the hole as you think," said Cousin Jim.

"And I've been figuring a lot on that new and going concern," Fred swept on unheeding, "I mean the younger generation. Neither you nor I had the problem they have. How are we backing them up? What I want to do—and you have got to help me figure it out—is to establish some form of capital of which the next generation can use the income. I don't mean money," he added a little shamefacedly.

"I know," said Cousin Jim.

"I owe it to Zozo," went on Fred, "I've got valuable experience through hideous failure. But I've got manhood enough left and energy enough left in me to make good before I meet the boy again. I want him to respect his dad *then*, anyway!"

Cousin Jim stirred.

"Fred," said he simply, "will you take me into partnership on that? I'm thinking it's time I went into business myself."

Against the gleaming Lake and the gold afterglow the trees stood silhouetted. And above and beyond, millions and millions of miles beyond, was a pale green lucence of unguessed space. The two men stared into it with the lifting hope that youth finds in sunrise.

THE END

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White
The glory hole

66825

81
W585
XGL



